

THE GREATEST DIASTER: THE FAILURE OF GREAT BRITAIN'S  
OTTOMAN EMPIRE POLICY, 1914

A Thesis

by

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## ABSTRACT

The Greatest Disaster: The Failure of Great Britain's  
Ottoman Empire Policy, 1914. (May 2002)

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time, British diplomats in Constantinople misjudged the nature of the Ottoman government and missed opportunities to improve Anglo-Turkish relations. Because they labored under the mistaken assumptions relayed by their diplomats in Turkey, British decision makers did not apprehend the depth of the Anglo-Turkish rift until it was beyond repair. Their last-ditch efforts on the eve of the First World War came far too late.

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## INTRODUCTION

"Has the time arrived for a permanent alliance between [our] two countries?"<sup>1</sup>

This was the question Djavid Bey, Finance Minister of the government of the Ottoman Empire, posed in October 1911 to Winston Churchill, Britain's First Lord of the Admiralty. At first glance, the possibility seems to have been a promising one for both countries. For more than seventy years Britain had considered itself Turkey's patron among the Great Powers.<sup>2</sup> Churchill was enthusiastic about the Anglo-Turkish relationship, and sent Djavid an encouraging reply.

Less than three years later, at the outbreak of the First World War, Churchill found himself adopting a far different tone. The Turks he had encouraged in 1911 now seemed poised to join Britain's enemies. "Siding with Germany now," he warned Turkey's rulers, "must mean the greatest disaster for you, your comrades & your country."<sup>3</sup>

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This thesis follows the style and format of the *Journal of British Studies*.

Nothing came of Churchill's admonition. Two months later, the British and Ottoman Empires were at war, and Britain's forces were preparing to attack Turkey in an operation that Churchill himself had conceived. Over the course of the next four years, the British lost almost half a million soldiers in an Anglo-Turkish war that destroyed the Ottoman Empire and changed the makeup of the modern Middle East.

Before 1914, Britain and Turkey had traditionally enjoyed a friendly relationship. How then did these two empires come to engage one another in a devastating war? In the years immediately preceding the First World War, the British government intended to ensure the Turks remained friendly neutrals in any conflict among the Great Powers. Why did this policy fail? The answers to these questions lie in the nature of the diplomatic relationship between Great Britain and the Ottoman Empire in the years preceding the First World War.

An evaluation of Britain's policy during the prewar period must begin with the Near Eastern policy established by Lord Palmerston, the Victorian statesman who sought to bolster the Ottoman state so it could serve as a buffer against the expansion of Russia. In the late nineteenth



century, however, this policy began to change. Britons became outspoken in their criticism of the Ottoman government's mistreatment of Christian minorities, and this popular feeling, in turn, began to alter the Anglo-Turkish relationship.

Prewar Anglo-Turkish relations must also be viewed in the context of the changing alignment of Europe's Great Powers. The growing power of Germany in the early 1900s caused Britain to shift its strategic focus from the Near East to the North Sea, and to resolve its differences in the Near East with France and Russia. From 1907 onward, the new friendship between Britain and Russia, Turkey's traditional enemy, made the Ottoman Empire less important as a buffer state, while making the Turks less trusting of Britain's intentions.

At the same time, British leaders pursued a variety of contradictory objectives in the Ottoman Empire in the prewar years. The British government attempted to help the Ottoman government improve its control of Ottoman domains, while simultaneously strengthening the security of British India by a gradual encroachment upon Ottoman territory in Mesopotamia, the Persian Gulf, and the Arabian Peninsula. Similarly, British leaders pledged to help the Turks reform

their own state institutions, but insisted upon the continued control of the Ottoman economy by Europeans. Finally, British statesmen proclaimed the importance of the Ottoman Empire's territorial integrity, but made no effort to prevent European armies from conquering the Turks' European provinces in the Balkan Wars. In light of these contradictions, the Turks began to view Britain not as a benefactor, but as a threat.

British decision makers never fully apprehended that their contradictory aims had created a serious rift in the Anglo-Turkish relationship. After the Young Turk revolution of 1908, British representatives in Constantinople continually supplied the British government with a distorted view of Ottoman affairs. As a result, leaders in London seriously misjudged the prospects and intentions of Turkey's leaders. The Young Turk revolution and the subsequent Ottoman defeats in the Balkan Wars merely served to confirm London's long-held assumption of the Ottoman state's weakness and instability. Because British leaders concluded that the Ottoman Empire was inevitably bound for partition among the Great Powers, they rejected Ottoman offers of alliance in the immediate prewar years. Seeking only to preserve the status quo between

1911 and 1914, Britain let its relationship with Turkey lapse into conflict.

My thesis is that Britain's policy towards the Ottoman Empire in the immediate prewar period was limited by British public opinion, Great Power politics, and Britain's own interests in areas under Ottoman rule. These factors led British decision-makers to pursue a policy rife with contradictory, often self-defeating aims. At the same time, British diplomats in Constantinople misjudged the nature of the Ottoman government and missed opportunities to improve Anglo-Turkish relations. Because they labored under the mistaken assumptions relayed by their diplomats in Turkey, British decision makers did not apprehend the depth of the Anglo-Turkish rift until it was beyond repair. Their last-ditch efforts on the eve of the First World War came far too late.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Djavid to Churchill, 28 October 1911, in Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume 2* (New York, 1969), pt. 2, pp. 1368-69. See photo of Djavid in the appendix to this thesis.

<sup>2</sup> In this paper, I intend to use "Turkey" and "Ottoman Empire" interchangeably, as did British officials of the prewar period. I also will use "Young Turks" as equivalent to the "Committee of Union and Progress

(C.U.P.)."

<sup>3</sup> Churchill to Enver Pasha, 15 August 1914, in  
Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume 3* (New  
York, 1973), pt. 1, p. 38.

RELUCTANT PATRONS: BRITAIN'S PRO-TURKISH POLICY  
IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Anglo-Turkish relations followed a rocky course throughout the nineteenth century. United by a common Russian enemy, the two empires began their alliance in warm friendship and the prospect of a reformed, modernized Ottoman state. Before long, however, Victorian Christian morality and Ottoman Islamic despotism proved to be inconsistent with one another, if not incompatible.

British support of the Ottoman Empire developed as part of the nineteenth-century concept of a European balance of power. In most instances, the leaders of the Great Powers—Britain, France, Russia, Austria, and Prussia—sought to ensure that no single European state could grow powerful enough to dominate the others in the way that Napoleonic France had done. Through its growing weakness, the Ottoman Empire posed a passive threat to this precarious balance. The Greek revolt, which ended successfully in 1832, opened a long period during which the Great Powers gradually encroached upon Ottoman territory. European diplomats recognized that a partition or seizure of the loosely held Turkish domains could upset the

delicate balance in one of the Powers' favor.

Russia appeared to have the most to gain from Turkey's weakness. Considering themselves the heirs of Byzantium and the Eastern Orthodox heritage, the Russians had long desired the Ottoman capital of Constantinople, both for its cultural value and for its strategic importance as a warm-water port offering access to the Mediterranean.<sup>1</sup> When the Egyptian armies of Mohammed Ali<sup>2</sup> threatened to conquer Syria and push into the Anatolian heartland in 1832, Czar Nicholas I acted quickly to take advantage of the unstable situation. The Czar's fleet descended from the Black Sea and took virtual control of Constantinople, ostensibly to protect the Ottomans from their Egyptian rivals. Though the Egyptian threat soon dissipated, the Russians remained and in early 1833 forced the Ottoman Sultan Mahmud II (r. 1808-39) to sign the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi, by which the Sultan surrendered to the Russians the right to intervene in Ottoman affairs whenever they perceived a threat to the Sultan's Orthodox subjects.<sup>3</sup>

These manifestations of Ottoman weakness alarmed British observers. Lord Palmerston, the British Foreign Secretary, remarked that under the terms of the Unkiar

Skelessi treaty, the "Russian Ambassador becomes the chief Cabinet Minister of the Sultan."<sup>4</sup> Palmerston found such Ottoman subservience to Russia unacceptable. If the Russians could control Constantinople and the Dardanelles, the Russian fleet could threaten Britain's Near East route to India.

Palmerston set about formulating a policy designed to strengthen the Ottoman state and render it capable of resisting Russian interference. When Mohammed Ali threatened the Ottomans again in 1839, Palmerston maintained a small British force in Syria to block the Egyptian advance.<sup>5</sup> But the direct use of British arms was only a temporary solution. With British fleets and manpower spread thinly around their empire, the British could not afford to guarantee Turkish security with direct force. Nor could the British afford to anger the other Powers by violating Ottoman integrity as had the Russians.<sup>6</sup> What Britain needed was an Ottoman state that could defend itself. The Israeli historian Elie Kedourie summarized the British assessment in this way:

The Ottoman Empire was to remain inviolate, and yet the Ottoman Empire was not able to defend itself. What the Ottoman government had to do was to adopt the very techniques that gave Europe its superiority in arms .... [I]f the independence and integrity of the

Ottoman Empire were to be preserved, it must begin immediately to reform on European lines.<sup>7</sup>

For British statesmen in the era of the great Reform Bill, the solution was clear: the means to strengthen the Ottoman Empire lay in internal reform of the Ottomans' archaic institutions. If the Turks could reorganize their military forces, and apply modern European methods to their bureaucracy and finances, they would, Palmerston believed,

in a very few years get Turkey into a condition of progressive improvement and there would be an end of all the nonsense which people talked about Turkey being in decay and falling to pieces ...<sup>8</sup>

This theory was quickly put into practice. The Ottoman statesman Reshid Pasha visited England for several months in 1839, meeting at length with Palmerston. By the time Reshid left London, he had developed a scheme of wide-ranging reforms along the lines espoused by his hosts. When the Sultan formally adopted these reforms, collectively known as the *Tanzimat*, Palmerston conveyed his congratulations on the project, which he described as "fraught with incalculable advantage to the Ottoman Empire."<sup>9</sup>

Under the new reforms, the Ottoman army experienced some success, turning back Mohammed Ali for good in 1841. But reforms in Ottoman administration and financing were



less encouraging. The reformers in Constantinople proved unwilling or unable to break the pattern of corruption in their empire's provincial government.<sup>10</sup> When the next serious Russian threat came, the Ottomans required direct British assistance, producing the very situation the *Tanzimat* reforms were supposed to render unnecessary. In April 1853, the Czar again pressed for the right to intervene in Ottoman affairs on behalf of Orthodox Christians, effectively renewing the humiliating treaty of Unkiar Skelessi.<sup>11</sup> Having remained passive in 1833, in 1853 Palmerston counseled war. Now Home Secretary, he forced the Aberdeen government, after some indecision, to oppose the Russian assertion with force.<sup>12</sup> The British joined with the Turks and the French in the resulting Crimean War of 1854-1856.

But the strong showing of British support in the Crimea had little effect on the course of Ottoman reforms. In the aftermath of the Crimean War, Lord Stratford de Redcliffe, the longtime British ambassador to Constantinople and cousin to George Canning, noted that Europeans were growing impatient with the Ottomans' ineffectual efforts to carry out the measures of the *Tanzimat*. In a private audience, he told the Sultan:

A feeling of disappointment, and almost of despair, was ... spreading throughout Europe; that the proofs of it were to be found not only in the remarks of private individuals and of public men in high stations, but in the Continental press—in that of France particularly—and of late, to a certain extent, in the leading journals of England.<sup>13</sup>

Lord Stratford himself observed with disgust that the Sultan's government tended to waste British loans, intended to help pay for reform measures, on extravagant furnishings for the Sultan's palace and harem.<sup>14</sup> But despite these abuses, he continued to assign the highest importance to the strengthening of the Turkish state. Soon after meeting with the Sultan, Lord Stratford opined:

[I]t would be difficult to find any statesman, or indeed any thinking individual, who does not see in [the Turkish Empire's] continued weakness the danger of a grand European struggle for its partition.<sup>15</sup>

Lord Stratford's views serve as an apt representation of the dichotomous Near Eastern policy of the mid-Victorian Conservative British government. Reports of Ottoman society tended to offend the Victorian morality, but the threat of a general war among the Great Powers made supporting the Ottomans a necessary evil. But if British statesmen were forced to adopt this position, Britons at large were not. From the high point of the Crimean War and the tenure of Lord Palmerston, the reputation of the

Ottoman state steadily declined in Britain. While the *Tanzimat* made negligible headway in the 1860s, the British public took intermittent umbrage at Ottoman repression of non-Muslims in Ottoman domains. When Turkish troops brutally quelled a revolt on Crete, *The Times* called on the Ottoman government to give up its rule of the island, while from the House of Lords the Duke of Argyll denounced the Foreign Office's pro-Turkish stance in the conflict.

Privately the government concurred. The Earl of Clarendon, Foreign Minister in 1865-1866, told the British ambassador in Constantinople, "The only way to improve [the Turks] is to improve them off the face of the earth."<sup>16</sup>

Publicly, however, the Conservative government of Lord Stanley, the Earl of Derby, declined to antagonize the Turks. The Queen's speech opening the first parliamentary session of 1867, delivered by Benjamin Disraeli as Stanley's Chancellor of the Exchequer, mildly acknowledged the need for "bringing about improved relations between the Porte and its Christian subjects." The speech stressed, however, that such improvements should be "not inconsistent with the sovereign rights of the Sultan."<sup>17</sup>

So began a period in which Britain's Ottoman Empire policy was a major point of political dispute between the

Liberal and Conservative parties. Liberals, with their evangelical constituency, consistently criticized the passivity with which the government treated reports of persecution of non-Muslim Ottoman subjects.<sup>18</sup> Conversely, Conservative government officials consistently resisted pressure to intervene in Ottoman affairs. When, for example, a delegation of Ottoman Jews approached the British consulate in Bucharest requesting protection from Turkish troops, Lord Stanley replied that it would be contrary to "policy and practice to extend British protection" to Jews "not subjects of Her Majesty."<sup>19</sup>

But the British public steadily lost patience with the pace of Ottoman reform. The editors of *The Times* represented this opinion when they addressed the Ottoman government early in 1876:

Your laws, although intrinsically good, are generally badly administered, and your poorer subjects, both Mussulman and Christian, neglected, lightly taxed, and persecuted when in default because your Treasury is insolvent. Your Treasury is bankrupt in consequence of your inattention to the wants of your people.<sup>20</sup>

The government, headed by Disraeli since 1868, found its Ottoman Empire policy increasingly vulnerable to Liberal criticism. Upon the event of his elevation to the peerage as Earl of Beaconsfield, Disraeli spent his final

speech in the Commons arguing that imperial interests dictated a pro-Turkish policy, and he stressed to his confidante Viscount Barrington that "Constantinople is the Key of India."<sup>21</sup> But reports from the Balkans overcame his arguments. In quelling separatist movements in Bulgaria, Ottoman troops massacred approximately 12,000 Christians, all of them nominal subjects of the Sultan. Public outrage spawned large demonstrations throughout Britain as imperial and strategic interests stumbled against Victorian Christian sensibilities. An especially large crowd gathered to hear the Bishop of Manchester denounce the "atrocities," and further demand to know why, when the government had allowed

the territorial dismemberment of Denmark, of Austria, of the Holy See, of France ... should we be so particularly anxious to secure the territorial integrity of Turkey?<sup>22</sup>

The Liberal leader William Gladstone caught the public mood by publishing a pamphlet entitled "The Bulgarian Horrors and the Eastern Question," in which he advocated expelling the Turks from Europe "bag and baggage."<sup>23</sup> Disraeli initially dismissed Gladstone's monograph as "ill-written," and "of all the Bulgarian horrors perhaps the greatest."<sup>24</sup> But the Prime Minister's

flippancy was ill timed. The pamphlet sold 200,000 copies within weeks, and an audience of 10,000 assembled at Blackheath to hear Gladstone warn the Turkish state, "Never again shall the hand of violence be raised by you."<sup>25</sup> Of greatest consternation for the Liberal leader was the fact that a British fleet had lain at anchor less than a day's travel away from the site of the massacres, but had done nothing. He was repelled by the government's apparent crime of omission during the massacres, and the possible encouragement this omission had given the Turks. "There is something horrid," he wrote a colleague,

in reflecting that, while horrors were going on, our fleet was ... within a few hours sail & not only was not there to arrest them but was believed by the perpetrators to be there for the purpose of securing their impunity.<sup>26</sup>

Fortunately for Disraeli, the prospect of a Russian conquest of Constantinople in 1877-1878 temporarily stemmed the Liberals' political assault.<sup>27</sup> While the Ottomans' Balkan territories rose in revolt, Russian armies dealt the Turks a series of disastrous defeats. Once again the Russians threatened to occupy the Straits and endanger the British route to India, and once again the British government felt compelled to prevent it. Only the arrival of a British fleet at Constantinople, followed by timely

British diplomatic support for Turkey at the Congress of Berlin in 1878, checked the Russian expansion.<sup>28</sup>

The government's formulation of policy upon imperial interests began to wear thin in Britain, however. After all, Disraeli had supported an abhorrent non-Christian regime against the Christian Czar. In this political atmosphere, Gladstone's continuing criticism did great damage to the Conservative government. He was able to make Disraeli's Near East policy a key issue in the general election of 1880, in which the electorate swept the Liberals into power.<sup>29</sup>

Once again in office, Gladstone began to turn British policy away from the Ottoman regime, which he blasted as "a bottomless pit of fraud and falsehood."<sup>30</sup> Whatever public support might have remained for the pro-Turkish policy had evaporated in the despotic measures of Abdul Hamid II (see appendix), who had usurped the sultanate from his weak-willed brother, Abdul Aziz, in a palace coup in August 1876. The new Sultan dealt a deathblow to Palmerston's legacy of reform by reversing much of the *Tanzimat*, suspending the empire's constitution, and dissolving the Ottoman parliament.

With Disraeli's passing from power, the Conservative

Party, too, gravitated toward Gladstone's policy. Though the new Conservative leader, Lord Salisbury, had orchestrated the pro-Turkish outcome at the Berlin Congress, he had also predicted the Turks could not maintain their empire for much longer. "We shall set up a rickety sort of Turkish rule again south of the Balkans," he minuted to the cabinet. "But it is a mere respite. There is no vitality left in them."<sup>31</sup> Salisbury made this opinion the country's policy when he ascended to the Prime Ministry in 1885. Acting as his own Foreign Minister, he declined to come to the Ottomans' aid when the newly independent Bulgaria annexed the Ottoman province of Eastern Rumelia, and ultimately lent his support to the Bulgarian Prince Alexander.<sup>32</sup>

For most of the next decade, the British government, led alternately by Salisbury, Gladstone, Lord Rosebery, and then Salisbury again, attempted to strike a middle course where the Ottoman Empire was concerned. Salisbury hoped to persuade the Turks to bring about enough improvement in conditions for Ottoman Christians to justify Britain's protection of the Ottoman state,<sup>33</sup> but this hope could not withstand the crescendo of Armenian massacres in the mid-1890s. After a series of small-scale killings in 1891-



1892, news reached England in the summer of 1894 that Kurdish tribesmen and Ottoman troops had massacred as many as 20,000 Armenian Christians, including women and children.<sup>34</sup>

At first, the British response, though stern in language, took a traditional tone. The governments of Lord Rosebery and Salisbury chose not to intervene with force to protect the Armenians, citing the necessity of respecting Abdul Hamid's sovereignty. Instead, the Great Powers jointly demanded that the Sultan punish those responsible for the massacres and establish the rule of law in his Armenian and Kurdish territories.<sup>35</sup> But by 1896, with Abdul Hamid refusing to act, Salisbury grew frustrated with the ineffectiveness of this diplomatic effort, and humiliated by the British public's indictment of his failure to act. He admitted to the Queen that "words are quite inadequate to describe the horrors," while privately he permitted no one in his family circle to mention the massacres.<sup>36</sup>

Meanwhile, Lord Curzon, Salisbury's representative in the House of Commons, announced that the government no longer believed itself bound to preserve the Ottoman Empire's rule in Asia.<sup>37</sup> Salisbury followed by signaling his desire for a fundamental shift in British policy.

Addressing the House of Lords, he declared that in choosing to support Turkey against Russia, Britain had "put all our money on the wrong horse." But in spite of Britain's mistake, Salisbury continued,

it is not very easy to withdraw from a step of that kind when it has once been taken, and ... you are practically obliged to go on .... I do not see we can take any other course except to exert what influence we may possess with the Powers of Europe to induce them to press on the Sultan such reforms as may be necessary not only to save his subjects from massacre, but to preserve his own empire from a ruin, which, if he does not take requisite precautions in time, cannot be long delayed.<sup>38</sup>

Herein lay Salisbury's dilemma: the Ottoman regime was repugnant, and Britain had been wrong to support it, but a more acceptable policy alternative had yet to present itself as long as containment of Russia remained Britain's primary aim in the Near East. But the Armenian massacres had caused Salisbury to reassess his country's Near Eastern priorities. He had written privately of his "dream" of partitioning the Ottoman Empire in 1895,<sup>39</sup> and had even broached the subject with Czar Nicholas II at Balmoral in 1896.<sup>40</sup> Within a few weeks of his "wrong horse" speech, Salisbury acted on his dream: he instructed Sir Nicholas O'Connor, the British ambassador in St. Petersburg, to sound out the Russians on the idea of ending the "Great Game"—the

Anglo-Russian rivalry in Asia—and finally partitioning the Ottoman Empire.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, six decades removed from the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi, Britain found itself on the verge of offering the Czar the very provisions that had seemed so objectionable in 1833 and had been worth going to war over in 1854. The Ottoman Empire's miserable record in the areas of reform and religious tolerance had caused the Turcophilism of Palmerston to give way to the Turcophobia of Gladstone and his morally minded followers. After the Bulgarian massacres of 1876, British governments only half-heartedly went through the motions of their pro-Turkish policies. By the time of the third Salisbury ministry in 1895, Britain's leaders longed to relieve themselves of their Turkish protégés in favor of a more palatable Near Eastern policy. The coming generation of British policy makers would seek such an alternative in a redefinition of Britain's relationships with its traditional enemies, France and Russia.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Rene Albrecht-Carre, *A Diplomatic History of Europe Since the Congress of Vienna* (New York, 1958), p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> Mohammed Ali Pasha (1769-1849), Albanian-born viceroy of Egypt (r. 1805-49). Mohammed Ali was the founder of the Egyptian royal house, and transformed Egypt from an Ottoman province under the control of the Mamelukes into a virtual hereditary monarchy.

<sup>3</sup> Sir Charles Kingsley Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston, 1830-1841: Britain, the Liberal Movement, and the Eastern Question*, 2 vols. (New York, 1969), 1:278-79, 304.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 1:305.

<sup>5</sup> Frederick Stanley Rodkey, "Lord Palmerston and the Rejuvenation of Turkey, 1830-41: Part II, 1839-41," *Journal of Modern History* 2 (June 1930): 199.

<sup>6</sup> Harold Temperley, "British Policy Towards Parliamentary Rule and Constitutionalism in Turkey (1830-1914)," *Cambridge Historical Journal* 4 (1933): 156-57.

<sup>7</sup> Elie Kedourie, *England and the Middle East: The Destruction of the Ottoman Empire, 1914-1921* (London, 1978), p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> Rodkey, p. 202.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>11</sup> Stanley Lane-Poole, *The life of the Right Honourable Stratford Canning, Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe: From His Memoirs and Private and Official Papers* (New York, 1976), p. 249. Lord Stratford was a first cousin of British statesman George Canning, sixteen years his senior.

<sup>12</sup> *The Annual Register*, LXXV (London, 1853), 210.

<sup>13</sup> Great Britain. Foreign Office, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, David Gillard, ed. (Frederick, Md., 1984), "B" 1:18.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., "B" 1:22.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., "B" 1:19.

<sup>16</sup> R.T. Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation 1876* (Hamden, CT, 1975), p. 18; Temperley, pp. 165-66.

<sup>17</sup> *The Annual Register*, LXXXIX (1867), 3.

<sup>18</sup> For example, *Hansard* (1867), cc. 746, 1001.

<sup>19</sup> *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, "B" 2:375.

<sup>20</sup> *The Times* (13 January 1876), p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> Geoffrey Miller, *Straits: British Policy Towards*

*the Ottoman Empire and the Origins of the Dardanelles Campaign* (Hull, England, 1997), p. 3; Robert Blake, *Disraeli* (London, 1966), p. 577.

<sup>22</sup> *The Times* (10 August 1876), p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> Shannon, pp. 109-10.

<sup>24</sup> Roy Jenkins, *Gladstone: A Biography* (New York, 1997), p. 400.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 404.

<sup>26</sup> Gladstone to Lord Granville, August 7, 1876, in *The Gladstone-Granville Correspondence*, ed. Agatha Ramm (London, 1998), p. 489.

<sup>27</sup> Marvin Swartz, *The Politics of British Foreign Policy in the Era of Disraeli and Gladstone* (New York, 1985), p. 102.

<sup>28</sup> Miller, *Straits*, p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> Blake, pp. 707-10.

<sup>30</sup> David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (New York, 1989), p. 30.

<sup>31</sup> Miller, *Straits*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>32</sup> W.N. Medlicott, "Historical Revisions XLIII: Lord Salisbury and Turkey," *History* 12, no. 47 (October 1927): 245.

<sup>33</sup> Lillian Penson, "The Foreign Policy of Lord Salisbury, 1878-80: The Problem of the Ottoman Empire," in *Studies in Anglo-French History*, ed. Alfred Colville and H.V.W. Temperley (New York, 1935; repr., Freeport, NY, 1967), p. 141.

<sup>34</sup> Peter Marsh, "Lord Salisbury and the Ottoman Massacres," *Journal of British Studies* 11, no. 2 (May 1972): 73-74. For the Parliamentary reaction, see *Hansard* (21 March 1895), cc. 1562-63.

<sup>35</sup> Marsh, p. 74.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Andrew Roberts, *Salisbury: Victorian Titan* (London, 1999), pp. 609-10.

<sup>37</sup> Curzon in the Commons, 11 February 1896, quoted in Marsh, 81.

<sup>38</sup> Salisbury in the Lords, 19 January 1897, quoted in Medlicott, 247.

<sup>39</sup> David Steele, *Lord Salisbury: A Political Biography* (London, 1999), p. 321.

<sup>40</sup> Roberts, pp. 643-44.

<sup>41</sup> A.L. Kennedy, *Salisbury: Portrait of a Statesman* (London, 1953), p. 274.

BRITAIN AND THE GREAT POWERS IN THE NEAR EAST,  
1898-1908: TOWARD SPHERES OF INFLUENCE

At the close of the Victorian Age, Britain, France, and Russia looked back upon a century of ensuring, at almost any cost, that none among them gained any advantage in the Near East. For several decades, what one Power desired in the Ottoman Empire, the other Powers adopted a policy of denying them. Yet in the space of a decade, three successive British Foreign Secretaries—Lord Salisbury, Lord Lansdowne, and Sir Edward Grey—succeeded in turning this system on its head. Between 1898 and 1908, Britain sought to resolve its Near Eastern rivalries by no longer frustrating, but accommodating each Power's aims in the Ottoman domains.

Russia was the first Power on the new British agenda. For seventy years the Russians had sought possession of Constantinople, and for just as long the British had thwarted them. But Lord Salisbury's 1898 overture to Russia<sup>1</sup> signaled a possible departure from this unfriendly equilibrium through a division of Ottoman territory into spheres of influence. In coming to this decision, Salisbury reflected the prevailing mood among his

countrymen. Within Britain, the strongly anti-Turkish public opinion of the 1890s, echoed loudly by outspoken Colonial Minister Joseph Chamberlain, led the Salisbury government to distance itself from Turkey.<sup>2</sup> At any rate, British military advisors determined in 1896 that British forces in the Mediterranean were no longer strong enough to stop the Russians from occupying the Dardanelles.<sup>3</sup> The military establishment argued persuasively that Britain should secure the route to India by fortifying Egypt--still nominally a possession of the Ottoman Sultan--instead of perpetuating an unrealistic policy of defending the Straits.<sup>4</sup> Under these circumstances, Salisbury had little to lose by reaching out to Russia. "It is evident," he cabled to O'Connor,

that both in respect to Turkey and China there are large portions which interest Russia much more than England and vice versa .... I would say that the portion of Turkey which drains into the Black Sea, together with the drainage valley of the Euphrates as far as Bagdad, interest Russia much more than England; whereas Turkish Africa, Arabia, and the Valley of the Euphrates below Bagdad interest England much more than Russia .... Would it be possible to arrange that where, in regard to these territories our counsels differ, the Power least interested should give way to and assist the other?<sup>5</sup>

Salisbury had made a few allusions to partitioning the Ottoman Empire since returning to power in 1895, but



none so concrete.<sup>6</sup> Czar Nicholas II and his foreign minister answered his query in vaguely encouraging terms about the desirability of taking up "the question of our respective spheres of influence in Turkey,"<sup>7</sup> but the encouragement proved short-lived. However great Salisbury's desire for a resolution, tensions between the two countries in the Far East stifled talk of an understanding in the Near East. Salisbury decided the Russians were "insincere," and Francis Bertie, one of Salisbury's senior aides in the Foreign Office, observed that "circumstances and Russian feeling and ambition" were "too strong" for the Czar to take up the British offer.<sup>8</sup>

The Czar gradually returned to the belligerency of his predecessors. A few months after Salisbury's gesture, he seemed positively dismissive of the idea. He informed Kaiser Wilhelm II that he had refused the British proposal "without thinking twice over it."<sup>9</sup> By late 1899, the Czar was articulating the traditional threat to British India, boasting that he could paralyze Britain anytime he wished simply by mobilizing an army in Turkestan, opposite the Indian frontier.<sup>10</sup>

Salisbury's hopes were dashed, and he would not live to see his overture come to fruition. He retired from

office in 1902, having already left foreign policy in the hands of Lord Lansdowne, and died the next year.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the setback, the figurative ice between the two empires had been broken. Other developments indicated that the route to an Anglo-Russian agreement over the Ottoman Empire could be found by first coming to an understanding with France, Russia's formal ally since 1894. Theophile Delcassé, the French Foreign Minister, had responded enthusiastically to the notion of an easing of Anglo-Russian tension,<sup>12</sup> and Britain's Near Eastern disputes with France would shortly seem less formidable than those with Russia.

The main bones of Near Eastern contention between France and Britain had much more to do with Egypt and the Levant than with Constantinople or the Straits. French interests in Ottoman territory were older than British interests, some even older than the Ottoman Empire itself. The Frankish kingdoms of the Crusades had long since disappeared, but their Gallic legacy survived, and French monasteries still dotted the Levantine landscape. The French presence in Syria returned in the aftermath of Napoleon's invasion of 1798. When the tide of war passed, French cultural and economic ties to the region remained,

particularly in Damascus, Beirut, and the Nile delta.<sup>13</sup> In the 1830s, French influence in Egypt was strong enough to persuade Lord Palmerston and his diplomats that Mohammed Ali was actually a French puppet.<sup>14</sup> This influence, coupled with France's potent Mediterranean fleet, brought several decades of Anglo-French rivalry in the Eastern Mediterranean, despite the two Powers' interlude of alliance during the Crimean War.<sup>15</sup>

The Suez Canal, too, had begun as a primarily French venture. British control of the canal did not come until 1875, when the bankrupt Egyptian Khedive sold his shares in the project to British investors. After the British occupied Egypt in 1882, France perennially pressed the British government to schedule the eventual withdrawal of British forces there.<sup>16</sup> But by the time of the Anglo-French confrontation at Fashoda in 1898, Delcassé recognized the futility of opposing British control of the Nile River. He decided to concede Egypt to Britain in return for the British concession of Morocco to France, along with some acknowledgement of France's special position in the Levant.<sup>17</sup>

British officials were inclined to accept this settlement, so important did they hold Britain's positions

in Egypt. Lord Cromer, the British Consul-General in Egypt, told Lord Lansdowne he considered the French offer "eminently satisfactory."<sup>18</sup> For three years, Lansdowne worked to resolve his country's differences with France. In an adroit display of diplomatic skill, he concluded the Anglo-French Entente of 1904 during a time in which Japan and Russia, Britain's and France's respective allies, were headed toward war in the Pacific.<sup>19</sup>

Though it arrived more than five years after Delcassé's original concession concerning Egypt, the 1904 agreement formalized the Anglo-French understanding in the Ottoman Empire. France would not oppose British dominion in Egypt and the Nile Valley, and Britain would not oppose French dominion in Morocco, Syria, and Lebanon. Thus the Anglo-French Entente of 1904 effectively divided a large part of the Ottoman Empire into British and French spheres of influence.

The new relationship with France made a redefinition of the Anglo-Russian relationship the natural next step. Lansdowne had already said as much in 1903, when he predicted:

A good understanding with France would not improbably be the precursor of a better understanding with Russia, and I need not insist upon the improvement which would

result in our international position ...<sup>20</sup>

In addition, the ground for an Anglo-Russian accord in the Near East seemed more fertile, for the strategic situation had changed in the years since the Czar first rejected Salisbury's proffer of 1898. Russia's ultimate objection to the British offer had been over the disputed territories of the Far East, but the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-05, and its subsequent resolution, removed this obstacle, albeit to Russia's disadvantage. In addition, the two empires had established a precedent of cooperation by working together in 1903 to pressure the Sultan to accept civil reforms in Macedonia, where the Ottoman authorities had systematically repressed Orthodox Christians.<sup>21</sup> The last time Russia had intervened on behalf of the Macedonians, in 1877-1878, Britain had sided with the Sultan. With policy in Lansdowne's hands, though, Britain's strict promotion of a balance of power among those states with interests in the Ottoman Empire was fading. Typical of the trend, in 1904 King Edward VII suggested to Sir Charles Hardinge, the British ambassador in St. Petersburg, that the government should offer Russia free use of the Dardanelles, which implied a fundamental change in the sovereignty of the Ottoman state.<sup>22</sup>

With the installation of a Liberal government in Britain in 1905, Sir Edward Grey succeeded Lansdowne as Foreign Secretary, but Grey continued the Entente and Lansdowne's attempt at a rapprochement with Russia.<sup>23</sup> Just as Salisbury and Lansdowne had benefited from the sincere desire of the French foreign minister to build better relations, so too did Grey benefit from the desire of Alexander Isvolsky, Russia's foreign minister, to better Anglo-Russian relations. Grey's discussions with Isvolsky brought an abrupt end to the "Great Game," the perennial Anglo-Russian struggle for supremacy in central Asia. Following Salisbury's logic of 1898, the two statesmen negotiated a division of the Near East into British and Russian spheres of influence, and the Anglo-French Entente Cordiale became the Anglo-French-Russian Triple Entente. Thereafter, The Russians could exercise influence in northern Persia and Mesopotamia without interference, while the British could expect to do the same in Afghanistan, southern Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf.<sup>24</sup>

With the greatest threat to Indian security resolved in principle, Grey decided to take the agreement even further and discuss what the Russians had sought for a century: a change in the status of the Dardanelles. He

told Count Benckendorff, the Russian ambassador in London,

I had always felt that this question of the Straits had been at the root of the difficulties between England and Russia for the last generation and more, and that, if permanent good relations were to be established between the two countries, which was what we desired, England must no longer make it a settled object of her policy to maintain the existing arrangement with regard to the passage of the Dardanelles.<sup>25</sup>

As might be expected, Grey's revelation left Isvolsky "beaming with pleasure."<sup>26</sup> In a stroke, the Anglo-Russian tension that underlay Britain's Ottoman Empire policy was defused. Consequently, this prospect greatly discomfited the Ottoman government. As long as Britain feared Russian conquest of the Dardanelles, the Turks could count on British support. But the Anglo-Russian agreement removed this guarantee, and Turkish suspicions ran wild as a result. Sir Nicholas O'Connor reported that the Sultan was "perplexed" by the agreement, and forecast that the German diplomats in Constantinople would fill the Sultan with "still further distrust of British policy."<sup>27</sup>

This prediction of O'Connor's highlights a significant motivation for the Anglo-Russian agreement: the emergence of Germany as a power in the Near East. If Britain's relationship with France and Russia in the region was moving toward resolution, the Anglo-German relationship in

the Near East was growing progressively thorny. In the years since Salisbury's reconsideration of his Ottoman Empire policy, German leaders had secured a position of great influence with the Sultan and his government by playing upon Ottoman fears that Britain, France, and Russia intended to partition the Turkish lands.<sup>28</sup> The result of these machinations was the creation of a new Great Power rivalry in the region.

Unlike France and Russia, Germany was not a traditional British rival in the Near East. For most of the nineteenth century, the British seemed to encourage German involvement in Ottoman affairs as a counterweight to Russia and France. Lord Palmerston had urged the Turks to employ a Hanoverian officer named Jochmus to help reorganize the Ottoman army in the face of the threat posed by Mohammed Ali.<sup>29</sup> Fifty years later, British observers saw no threat when Colmar Freiherr von der Goltz, a general of the new German Empire, assumed the similar responsibility of modernizing Abdul Hamid's army. This benignity extended to financial concerns as well. In the 1890s, the British did not oppose the Turks' extensive concessions to the German-owned Anatolian Railway Company. This firm, which planned to build the Baghdad Railway, actually sought to



make the venture a joint one by soliciting the investment of British capital.<sup>30</sup>

But the situation changed in 1898, the fateful year of Fashoda and Lord Salisbury's overture to the Czar. In an instance typical of his erratic personal diplomacy, Kaiser Wilhelm II paid a visit to Abdul Hamid in Constantinople and declared his personal friendship to the Sultan, the man whom English schoolchildren called "Abdul the Damned" and whom Salisbury held responsible for the Armenian massacres a mere three years earlier.<sup>31</sup> Moving further, perhaps as part of his effort to pressure Britain into alignment with the Triple Alliance, the Kaiser declared himself the protector and friend of the world's 300 million Muslims.<sup>32</sup> The declaration was a clear affront to Britain, Russia, and France, all of whom ruled over large Muslim populations. With a negligible number of Muslim subjects of his own, the Kaiser had nothing to lose by encouraging Muslim unrest; he had already revealed to the Czar his view of Islam as a card that might be played against Britain in the event of an Anglo-German conflict.<sup>33</sup>

The Kaiser's visit and show of support yielded much greater influence for Germany in the halls of the Sublime

Porte, the Ottoman seat of government. Just a month after his departure, the Porte awarded the Anatolian Railway Company a particularly lucrative concession. In London *The Times* declared, "there can be no doubt that the concession was prompted by the visit of the Emperor William to Constantinople."<sup>34</sup> The Kaiser's self-insinuation into Ottoman affairs made Germany a serious threat to Britain's Near Eastern interests for the first time, and British observers took note.<sup>35</sup>

This perception of German advantage in Constantinople changed the strategic significance of the Baghdad Railway. Because the railway promised to link the interior of the Ottoman Empire with the Persian Gulf, it might also expose the western sea-lanes to India. For Britain, the Persian Gulf had become a region of vital interest, and the prospect of another Power, especially one as potentially hostile as Germany, controlling commerce and communication to the Gulf from the landward side would be, in Lansdowne's words, "a great misfortune."<sup>36</sup> Yet that was precisely what seemed to be happening in 1903, when Prime Minister Arthur Balfour reported to the Commons that a revision of the Baghdad Railway concession

Leaves the whole scheme of railway development through

Asia Minor to the Persian Gulf entirely in the hands of a Company under German control. To such a Convention we have never been asked to assent, and we could not in any case be a party to it.<sup>37</sup>

Military analysts concurred. In 1904, a General Staff assessment warned that by "standing aloof" from the railway project, Britain would "incur the risk of seeing another Power, perhaps Germany, acquire a strong, if not predominating, naval position in the Gulf."<sup>38</sup> Two years earlier, the American naval strategist Alfred T. Mahan had warned that such a British concession in the Persian Gulf would

imperil Great Britain's naval situation in the Far East, her political position in India, her commercial interests in both, and the Imperial tie between herself and Australasia.<sup>39</sup>

These alarming observations were merely among the earliest in a veritable flood of dire assessments between 1902 and 1908, each of them reiterating the new-found German threat.<sup>40</sup> The warnings appeared in a diplomatic atmosphere already charged with ill will, for when the French conceded Britain's dominion in Egypt in 1904, Germany aroused British ire by attempting to intervene. The German government demanded overseas colonies in return for accepting the permanency of Britain's Egyptian presence.<sup>41</sup> Though the Germans eventually withdrew their

demands, British statesmen viewed Germany's actions in the region with increasing distrust. In view of the German influence in Constantinople, the Foreign Office began to assume a German hand behind the Porte's more offensive actions. Grey warned the government that Germany was probably "stirring up trouble through the Sultan of Turkey in Egypt."<sup>42</sup> When Ottoman troops provoked a border incident by advancing toward Suez a few months later, Lord Cromer declared, "Of course our German cousins are behind it all."<sup>43</sup> The British had clearly identified their new primary enemy in the Near East: so began an Anglo-German struggle for preeminence in Ottoman affairs that would not end until 1914.

Britain's traditional Ottoman Empire policy underwent a profound change in the decade following Salisbury's first broaching of the subject with Russia. Whereas the primary nineteenth-century British aim in the Near East had been to strengthen the Ottoman state in order to keep its strategic points from falling to Russia or France, the opening of the twentieth century found Britain allied with those countries. By 1908, Britain had achieved Salisbury's goal of ending rivalries in the Near East with the Russians and French. Though Lansdowne and Grey both pledged to support

the continued viability of the Ottoman Empire, in practice their policy had allowed for successive understandings with France and Russia that divided much of the Sultan's realm into spheres of influence, including a newly permanent British Egypt. They had even reopened the sacrosanct question of control of the Straits. Grey had shown himself only weakly wedded to the idea of Ottoman integrity.

Very little could have been done in 1908 to prevent the physical partition of the Ottoman State, had the Triple Entente Powers desired it. Before any of the Powers could act on this idea, however, something extraordinary happened: a group of young Ottoman revolutionaries overthrew the Sultan, and cast the diplomacy of the region into disarray once again.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> See p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Jay, *Joseph Chamberlain: A Political Study* (Oxford, 1981), p. 213.

<sup>3</sup> Margaret M. Jefferson, "Lord Salisbury and the Eastern Question, 1890-98," *Slavonic and East European Review* 39, no. 92 (1960): 58-60.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Salisbury to O'Connor, January 25, 1898, in *British Documents on the Origins of the War*, ed. G.P. Gooch and Harold Temperley, 11 vols. (London, 1927), 1, no. 9, p. 8 (cited hereafter as *BD*).

<sup>6</sup> Steele, pp. 321-23.

<sup>7</sup> O'Connor to Salisbury, February 3, 1898, in *BD1*, no. 11, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> Memorandum from Bertie, March 14, 1898, in *BD1*, p. 17.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> Aaron L. Friedberg, *The Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895-1905* (Princeton, 1988), p. 217.

<sup>11</sup> Apparently the Armenian massacres that had led Salisbury to seek a different policy also affected him personally. On his deathbed he was heard to refer to "those poor Armenians." Quoted in Marsh, p. 83.

<sup>12</sup> Sir E. Monson to Salisbury, September 8, 1898, *BD1*, no. 58, p. 37.

<sup>13</sup> *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, "B" 16:28-31, 37.

<sup>14</sup> Roger Adelson, *London and the Invention of the Middle East* (New Haven, 1995), p. 8. Mohammed Ali was the Albanian-born governor of Ottoman Egypt, who threatened in the 1830s to overthrow the Sultanate.

<sup>15</sup> C.I. Hamilton, *Anglo-French Naval Rivalry, 1840-1870* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 9-12.

<sup>16</sup> Roger Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy, 1800-1914* (London, 1981), pp. 216-43.

<sup>17</sup> P.M.H. Bell, *France and Britain 1900-1940: Entente and Estrangement* (London, 1996), pp. 23-24.

<sup>18</sup> Cromer to Lansdowne, July 17, 1903, in *BD2*, pp. 298-99.

<sup>19</sup> B.J.C. McKercher, "Diplomatic Equipoise: The Lansdowne Foreign Office, the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, and the Global Balance of Power," *Canadian Journal of History* 24, no. 3 (1989): 320.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in George W. Monger, *The End of Isolation: British Foreign Policy, 1900-1907* (London, 1963), pp. 132-33.

<sup>21</sup> *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, "B" 19:180.

<sup>22</sup> Briton Cooper Busch, *Hardinge of Penshurst: A Study in the Old Diplomacy* (Hamden, CT, 1980), p. 74.

<sup>23</sup> Sir Edward Grey (Viscount Grey of Fallodon), *Twenty-Five Years*, 2 vols. (New York, 1925), 1:74-75, 147-48.

<sup>24</sup> Fromkin, p. 31.

<sup>25</sup> Grey to Sir Arthur Nicolson, March 19, 1907, in BD4, no. 258, p. 280.

<sup>26</sup> Nicolson to Grey, March 27, 1907, in BD4, no. 261, p. 283.

<sup>27</sup> O'Connor to Grey, April 30, 1907, in BD4, no. 267, p. 289.

<sup>28</sup> Miller, *Straits*, p. 12.

<sup>29</sup> Rodkey, p. 194.

<sup>30</sup> Memorandum by J.A.C. Tilley, January 5, 1905, in BD1, Appendix, p. 333.

<sup>31</sup> Miller, *Straits*, p. 9. Upon hearing of the Armenian massacres of late 1896, the Kaiser himself had declared, "The Sultan must be deposed." See Jefferson, p. 53.

<sup>32</sup> René Albrecht-Carrié, *A Diplomatic History of Europe Since the Congress of Vienna* (New York, 1958), pp. 238-39; Ulrich Trumpener, "Germany and the End of the Ottoman Empire," in *The Great Powers and the End of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Marian Kent (London, 1984), p. 112.

<sup>33</sup> Donald M. McKale, *War by Revolution: Germany and Great Britain in the Middle East in the Era of World War I* (Kent, OH, 1998), p. 10.

<sup>34</sup> *The Times* (1 February 1899), p. 7.

<sup>35</sup> Most vocal among those arguing this point was Joseph Chamberlain. See Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860-1914* (London, 1980), p. 261.

<sup>36</sup> Minute by Lansdowne, April 10, 1902, in BD2, no. 205, p. 178-79.

<sup>37</sup> Balfour in the Commons, April 23, 1903, quoted in BD2, no. 219, pp. 190-91.

<sup>38</sup> General Staff memorandum, November 16, 1904, in *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, "B" 17:257.

<sup>39</sup> Foreign Office, "Memorandum Respecting the Bagdad Railway," March 10, 1906, in *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, "B" 17:330.

<sup>40</sup> e.g., O'Connor to Grey, February 6, 1907, in *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, "B" 17:364-71.

<sup>41</sup> McKale, p. 15; McKercher, p. 321.

<sup>42</sup> Memorandum by Grey, February 20, 1906, in BD3, no. 299, pp. 266-67.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in McKale, p. 19.



## BRITISH NEAR EAST POLICY, 1908-1914:

## YEARS OF CONTRADICTION

Having started, under Lord Salisbury, down a path toward partition of the Ottoman Empire, Britain attempted to change course in support of the Young Turk regime in 1908. But the change was only a half-step, and in the prewar years British policies stuck indecisively between the two extremes, leaving British actions in the Near East to devolve into a bundle of contradictions.

After the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907, King Edward VII met the Czar in June 1908 at Reval, Estonia to discuss the two empires' relationship further. Though the talks produced little of a concrete nature, Russian Foreign Minister Alexander Isvolsky left the meeting in the belief he had received Britain's agreement to eventually allow Russian warships free passage through the Dardanelles.<sup>1</sup> Though no written record of the meeting was taken, Isvolsky's assumption is entirely plausible since the senior Foreign Office official at Reval was Sir Charles Hardinge, now a Permanent Undersecretary and Grey's principal advisor. Hardinge considered the Dardanelles relatively unimportant for Britain in view of the strong

British position in Egypt, and as early as 1904 he had shown a willingness to concede Russia the Straits.<sup>2</sup> Such a concession would entail the virtual Russian control of Constantinople, which in turn would mean the virtual end of the Ottoman Empire.

Meanwhile, within the Ottoman Empire, a secret organization plotted to topple the Sultanate and restore the Ottoman Constitution of 1876. The Committee of Union and Progress (C.U.P.), comprised of cells of mid-ranking army officers, spread throughout the empire, received news of the Reval meeting and assumed Britain and Russia had struck a deal to partition their empire. This alarming prospect prompted the leaders of the C.U.P. to attempt to rescue the Turkish state before it fell to the Great Powers.<sup>3</sup> From their power base in Salonica in present-day Greece (see map in appendix), the C.U.P., better known as the "Young Turks," began an extraordinary uprising in early July 1908. Troops sent to suppress the revolt switched sides without a fight. In less than a month the revolutionaries restored the constitution with no bloodshed, and Abdul Hamid remained ruler in name only.<sup>4</sup>

After more than three decades of observing massacres of Christians under Abdul Hamid's despotic rule, the

British public reacted to the Young Turk revolution with a sense of euphoric disbelief. The British government, too, became swept up in the tide of optimism for the Anglo-Turkish relationship. The Foreign Office had grown increasingly frustrated with the German ascendancy at the Porte, and Grey complained that Germany's diplomats garnered influence in the Ottoman government because of their willingness, and Britain's lack thereof, to "pay Abdul Hamid's price" for favor, meaning bribery and tacit approval of governmental abuses.<sup>5</sup> With the end of Abdul Hamid's power, Germany seemed instantly to lose its privileged position in Constantinople. In the Foreign Office, Hardinge saw the revolution as an opportunity "to entirely reverse our attitude and policy towards Turkey of the last few years."<sup>6</sup> Grey himself sounded enthusiastic about the promise of real reforms for the Ottoman Empire in his instructions to Sir Gerard Lowther, the newly appointed British ambassador who arrived in Constantinople shortly after the revolt. Grey called the restoration of the 1876 constitution "marvellous," and told Lowther, "Our course is clear; we must welcome and encourage this prospect as long as it continues."<sup>7</sup>

Grey's instructions highlighted a serious problem,

however. Grey now faced the quandary of both supporting the Young Turks and standing by the important Anglo-Russian meetings of the year before, in which Grey had in principle agreed the Russians should have rights of egress through the Straits.<sup>8</sup> "The delicate point will be Russia," he told Lowther. "We have now to be pro-Turkish without giving rise to any suspicion that we are anti-Russian."<sup>9</sup> Having implied his readiness to redefine control of the Straits, Grey had now to retreat from this pledge without offending his Russian allies.

The Russians quickly put this situation to the test. In the immediate aftermath of the Young Turk revolt Isvolsky argued, "If Russia could satisfy Turkey that an arrangement about the Straits was safe for Turkish interests, England should not oppose it." Isvolsky also warned that, because of the volatile state of Russian domestic politics, British intransigence on the Straits question would be "fatal" to the Anglo-Russian Convention.<sup>10</sup> Grey demurred, however, pointing out to his Russian counterpart "how critical the moment was," and that "an independent and well-governed Turkey [w]as the only alternative to anarchy and confusion."<sup>11</sup> Though he had appeared ready to act bilaterally the year before, Grey now

claimed Britain could not support Russia's desire for the Straits without the approval of the rest of the Great Powers. Since a consensus among the Powers over the Straits was impossible, Grey's position kept the Russians at bay for the next five years.<sup>12</sup>

Yet even had the Foreign Secretary wished to accede to the Russian initiative, public opinion in Britain was strongly against such a move. After so many decades of Ottoman decadence, the Young Turks deserved a chance, in British eyes, to repair their empire through liberalization.<sup>13</sup> Grey, a Liberal himself, certainly seemed much less willing to administer a coup de grâce to the republican Young Turks than he had seemed ready to do to the tyrannical Abdul Hamid.

In this context Britain's position on the Straits froze into a replica of the nineteenth-century balance of power. In Grey's view, the European powers were far better off leaving Constantinople in Turkish hands and therefore avoiding a dangerous struggle for possession of the city and the Dardanelles, especially since the revitalized Young Turk regime seemed more likely to fight for survival than had Abdul Hamid. As he later explained to Sir George Buchanan, the British ambassador in St. Petersburg, Grey

believed "the only policy to which we can become a party is one directed to avoid collapse and partition of Asiatic Turkey."<sup>14</sup>

Yet the British position, vocally supportive of the integrity of the Ottoman state, ran counter to the realities of Britain's actions in Ottoman territory. For three decades the British themselves had gradually encroached upon Ottoman lands in order to bolster the security of their empire. Their planned short-term intervention in Egypt in 1882 had become a permanent occupation. In the 1890s, the British navy had established outposts on the Ottoman side of the Persian Gulf in order to secure the western shipping routes to India. What began as an informal arrangement with the Gulf emirates to prevent piracy developed into a set of formal alliances. Most visible of these was Britain's 1899 treaty with the sheikh of Kuwait, wherein the sheikh agreed, in return for British naval protection, to let Britain determine Kuwait's foreign policy.<sup>15</sup> When Ottoman officials objected to the British intervention, Sir Nicholas O'Connor responded by sending a gunboat to Kuwait in a demonstration of the official British position that Ottoman authority no longer extended there.<sup>16</sup>

Likewise, once established in Egypt, the British affirmed their virtual ownership of the small ports of Aden (South Yemen) and Aqaba through a process similar to that seen in Kuwait. Though these areas technically belonged to the Sultan, the British quickly came to view Ottoman authority defunct there. In 1905, at the instigation of Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of India, British army engineers surveyed "the limits of Turkish territory" around the Aden "protectorate."<sup>17</sup> Similarly, when Abdul Hamid dispatched troops to Aqaba in 1906, Grey indignantly called the Sultan's action a "gratuitous disturbance" of the status quo in the region, even though Aqaba was nominally within Ottoman borders, and sent the Porte a survey of where in the area the British expected Ottoman authority to end.<sup>18</sup>

The Anglo-Russian convention of 1907 extended the British encroachment on Ottoman lands by dividing Mesopotamia into Russian and British zones. Though Mesopotamia, like Egypt, Aqaba, and the Gulf emirates, was an Ottoman possession, Curzon again persuaded the British government to assert its authority over the Persian Gulf city of Basra and the Euphrates River valley toward Baghdad.<sup>19</sup> Given this record of British intervention, the Young Turks' assumption that the Reval meeting had settled

on partition seems well within the bounds of logic. Grey's pronouncements on the integrity of Ottoman territory notwithstanding, Britain was clearly consolidating its own control of Ottoman territory bordering the Red Sea and Persian Gulf.<sup>20</sup> Britain's security interests in the Near East were creating an apparent disparity between policies and actions.

Alongside the territorial disparity, a gap had been developing between British pronouncements and actions respecting the Ottoman economy. In 1908, Grey spoke of the need for a healthier Turkish economy, and seemed hopeful that the Turkish government's finances should "very easily be put right."<sup>21</sup> At the same time, Britain and the other Powers continued a relentless competition for lucrative concessions and contracts from the Turks, with the Porte generally obligated to guarantee a minimum level of profit, no matter how poorly a particular investment might perform. For example, practically all of the railways in the Ottoman Empire were owned by European concerns, with a "kilometric guarantee" of return based not on actual railway revenues, but on the length of track laid.<sup>22</sup> Regardless of talk of reforms in the Ottoman economy, the Powers seemed quite willing to secure contracts for public works that offered a



good return for European investors, but that the Ottomans did not necessarily need.<sup>23</sup> Immediately before the Young Turk revolt, Gerald Fitzmaurice, the Chief Dragoman<sup>24</sup> of the British embassy in Constantinople, saw the contradiction in British aims. He observed that British representatives in Turkey were expected "to attempt the impossible task of furthering our commercial interests" while having to "goad" the Turks with "pinpricks of reform proposals."<sup>25</sup>

The attitude described by Fitzmaurice also prevailed in negotiations over the extensive capitulations Europeans had obtained by degree in Turkey during the nineteenth century. The capitulations conceded to Europeans certain immunities from Ottoman laws and taxes, and gave European embassies the right to maintain private postal services. For Ottoman nationalists, the capitulations symbolized the European domination of their country, and their abolition was one of the Young Turks' most basic goals.<sup>26</sup> Though the Young Turk regime made clear its animosity to the capitulations, British diplomats never seriously considered altering them. The annual report of each British ambassador in Constantinople in the prewar period contains a detailed description of negotiations over the capitulations, and their preservation was clearly a task of

high priority for British ambassadors in Constantinople.<sup>27</sup>

Even more significant than the matters of concessions and capitulations was the issue of the Ottoman public debt. Faced with bankruptcy in the aftermath of the Crimean War, the Ottoman government had been obliged to give up its rights to revenues from fishing, salt, tobacco, and silk within the empire to a commission of European administrators. The administrators, usually headed by a Briton, collected those revenues directly and used them to pay the interest on the Ottoman debt.<sup>28</sup> By the time of the Young Turk revolution, the debt administration controlled a full 12 to 15 percent of all Ottoman revenues and employed a staff of more than 8,000, making it larger than any other Ottoman government agency.<sup>29</sup> The Ottomans regarded the debt administration with great resentment, especially since the administration always kept any surplus it collected, regardless of whatever shortfall the rest of the Ottoman government might face.<sup>30</sup> Economic historians have concluded that the debt administration brought little benefit to the Ottoman state, while effectively securing the return of European investors.<sup>31</sup>

In a sense, the effort to maintain the capitulations was a measure of Britain's lack of faith in Ottoman law and

order. The British and other European citizens living or working in the Ottoman Empire were loath to give up their special privileges in view of the arbitrary application of justice that carried over from the reign of Abdul Hamid.<sup>32</sup> The C.U.P. recognized this fact, and hoped to institute reforms that would eventually cause the capitulations to wither away. Though Lowther was aware of the Young Turk position, and later reported it to Grey,<sup>33</sup> the British diplomats in Constantinople considered the prospect of reform in the Ottoman Empire an exercise in futility. After the initial optimism of the Young Turk revolt, Lowther became so pessimistic that he actually endorsed an unsuccessful counter-revolution attempt by Abdul Hamid in early 1909.<sup>34</sup>

Yet Grey and his fellow Liberal leaders still believed reforms were necessary to keep the Ottoman Empire from falling into chaos. Not trusting the Turks to carry out a program of reform on their own, the British government encouraged Britons, especially military officers, to take up employment in the Ottoman bureaucracy and military services. This practice led to some incongruous instances of involvement in internal Ottoman affairs. In one extraordinary case, a young British

officer named Wyndham Deedes accepted a commission in the Ottoman gendarmerie in 1910 while retaining his commission in the King's army. In a strange series of conflicts of interest, Deedes found himself commanding troops who fought against European forces that had tacit British support. Deedes' Tripolitan police force resisted the Italian invasion of Tripoli in 1911, in which Britain maintained an uneasy neutrality and Deedes himself left the region on London's orders during the brief conflict. In 1912-1913, his troops fought against the Balkan League, a coalition of Christian forces that once again had broad public support in Britain, though Deedes again left the country during the actual fighting.<sup>35</sup>

Deedes was far from alone in his predicament. When the Balkan Wars broke out, British admirals commanded both the Greek and Turkish navies, which were at war. The British shipbuilding industry only confused the situation further by offering, with the approval of the British Admiralty, to build new dreadnought battleships for both sides.<sup>36</sup>

These conflicts stemmed from the incongruities in the British position as a whole. Though Grey pledged British friendship for the Young Turk regime, the British

government's support for the Ottomans proved rather lukewarm when tested. As the Turks became embroiled in a series of crises and wars between 1908 and 1914, Britain either remained neutral or gave thinly disguised support to Turkey's enemies. When Austria-Hungary annexed the Ottoman province of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908, Grey urged the Young Turks to accept the loss of territory in return for pecuniary compensation.<sup>37</sup> Later, attacked by Italy in 1911, the Turks approached Britain seeking a defensive alliance, but Grey, despite his policy of preserving Turkey's territorial integrity, rejected the Turkish offer.<sup>38</sup> With no Great Power opposition, Italy seized both Tripoli and the Dodecanese Islands off the Anatolian coast.

Britain maintained a similar neutrality in the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913. When the Balkan League of Greece, Bulgaria, Montenegro and Serbia threatened to subdue most of Ottoman Europe, Britain appeared unwilling to save the Turks from the loss of their Christian territories in Europe. In the midst of the Balkan League's offensive, Grey again rejected a Turkish request for a defensive alliance, telling the Commons he had done so for fear of angering the other European powers.<sup>39</sup> At roughly the same time, Grey made his statement to Buchanan, already noted,

calling for the preservation of "Asiatic Turkey."<sup>40</sup> In retrospect, Grey's statement has a curious connotation, since it was not Asiatic Turkey, but European Turkey that was under threat at the time he made it. Instead, Grey urged the Turks to forget their European territories altogether and focus on consolidating control of their Asiatic possessions,<sup>41</sup> even though the loss of Thrace to Bulgaria left Constantinople dangerously exposed to land assault (see map in appendix).

Grey's willingness to see Ottoman rule disappear from the Balkans may have carried with it the memory of Gladstone's call to send the Turks from Europe "bag and baggage."<sup>42</sup> For despite the changes brought to the Near East by the Young Turk revolution, Grey and his fellow British policy makers remained resigned to the idea, in historian David Fromkin's words, that "the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East would collapse one day and ... the European powers would have to pick up the pieces."<sup>43</sup> Hardinge was a long-time doubter of the viability of the Young Turk regime, while the reports of the British embassy in Constantinople constituted a chorus of predictions of Ottoman doom.<sup>44</sup> Throughout 1912 Lowther reported that the C.U.P. was on the verge of being overthrown, and in the

midst of the Second Balkan War he drew up a plan, for Grey's benefit, to divide Asiatic Turkey into zones to be overseen by Britain, France, Russia, and Germany.<sup>45</sup> These were hardly the voices Britain needed to attempt a positive diplomacy in the region.

The final contradiction in Britain's prewar Near East policy lay in the fact that the British presence in the eastern Mediterranean waned as the intensity of crises in the region waxed. In 1912, the year of the First Balkan War, Churchill persuaded the cabinet of Prime Minister H.H. Asquith to allow him to redeploy most of the British Mediterranean fleet to the North Sea in order to counter the growing naval power of Germany. To fill the strategic void, Churchill arranged for the French fleet to protect the Entente Powers' interests in the Mediterranean, supported by a small British squadron.<sup>46</sup> Thus, having ruled the Mediterranean Sea since defeating Napoleon's fleet at the Battle of the Nile, Britain voluntarily surrendered its control back to France. Some officials, however, believed the weakening of British naval power in the Mediterranean would hurt British prestige in the region. In the Foreign Office, Sir Eyre Crowe, Assistant Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, predicted that Churchill's move promised

"seriously to weaken British influence at Constantinople, and encourage Turkey to join forces with the Triple Alliance and to attempt the reconquest of Egypt."<sup>47</sup>

Likewise, though he grudgingly went along with Churchill's policy, Lord Kitchener, the governor of British Egypt, warned Grey:

There is no doubt that the proposed reduction of the Naval forces maintained in the Mediterranean must seriously affect and endanger our position in Egypt, besides lowering our prestige and influence in the surrounding countries.<sup>48</sup>

Yet in the final months of peace, British diplomats would long for all the prestige and influence they could muster.

After the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 and the Young Turk revolution of 1908, Britain's policy toward the Ottoman Empire was a set of mixed signals. The British pledged to preserve the Dardanelles for Turkey after having implied the Russians should ultimately control the Straits. Likewise, Grey spoke of the importance of Turkey's integrity while his countrymen staked claims to more and more Ottoman territory. The British recognized the C.U.P.'s need for a stronger economy in order to survive, but refused to revise the capitulations or the administration of the Ottoman public debt. Grey and his



peers encouraged the Turks to reform their government, but did not trust them to do it, and so involved the British government in bizarre conflicts of interest. Though professing friendship and patronage, the British twice rejected Turkish alliances and allowed Ottoman Europe to disappear, while abdicating the region in favor of the French navy.

In the decisive year of 1914, British leaders would attempt to resolve their country's contradictory policies in an effort to protect British interests in the Near East from the prospect of war.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Miller, *Straits*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>2</sup> Busch, *Hardinge of Penshurst*, p. 74.

<sup>3</sup> Annual Report for Turkey for the Year 1908, in Lowther to Grey, February 17, 1909, in *BD5*, p. 249; Busch, *Hardinge of Penshurst*, p. 136.

<sup>4</sup> Feroz Ahmad, *The Young Turks* (Oxford, 1969), pp. 1-14.

<sup>5</sup> Grey, 1:127.

<sup>6</sup> Hardinge to Sir George Barclay, Private, July 28, 1908, in Busch, *Hardinge of Penshurst*, p. 136.

<sup>7</sup> Grey to Lowther, Private, August 11, 1908, in *BD5*, no. 207, p. 266.

<sup>8</sup> Grey to Nicolson, October 14, 1908, in *BD5*, no. 379, p. 443.

<sup>9</sup> Grey to Lowther, Private, July 8, 1908, quoted in Joseph Heller, *British Policy Towards the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1914* (London, 1983), p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Grey to Nicolson, October 14, 1908, in *BD5*, no.

379, p. 443.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.; Grey, 1:172.

<sup>12</sup> A.L. Macfie, "The Straits Question, 1908-1914," *Balkan Studies* 22, no. 2 (1981): 322-330.

<sup>13</sup> Busch, *Hardinge of Penshurst*, p. 144.

<sup>14</sup> Grey to Buchanan, July 4, 1913, in *BD10*(1), no. 541, pp. 480-82.

<sup>15</sup> Memorandum by R.V. Harcourt, Foreign Office, October 29, 1901, in *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, "B" 20:199.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>17</sup> R.N. Mehra, "Circumstances Leading to the Demarcation of the Aden Protectorate (South Yemen) Frontier with Yemen by the Anglo-Turkish Boundary Commission of 1902-05," *Quarterly Review of Historical Studies* (Calcutta) 17, no. 3 (1977-78): 153.

<sup>18</sup> Grey, 1:119.

<sup>19</sup> Briton Cooper Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1894-1914* (Berkeley, 1967), pp. 106-11.

<sup>20</sup> G.F. Abbott, *Turkey, Greece, and the Great Powers: A Study in Friendship and Hate* (New York, 1916), pp. 164-66.

<sup>21</sup> Grey to Lowther, Private, August 23, 1908, in *BD5*, no. 208, pp. 266-67.

<sup>22</sup> Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf*, pp. 190-235 *passim*.

<sup>23</sup> The prime example of such contracts were those for warships, to be discussed later.

<sup>24</sup> The Chief *Dragoman*--a corruption of the Arabic word for "interpreter"--acted as the embassy's liaison with local officials and senior interpreter in Turkish. Over time Fitzmaurice came to act as the ambassador's deputy in Constantinople.

<sup>25</sup> Fitzmaurice to William Tyrell, April 12, 1908, in *BD5*, no. 196, p. 247.

<sup>26</sup> Ahmad, p. 22.

<sup>27</sup> e.g., Annual Report on Turkey for the Year 1913, in *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, "B" 20:416-24.

<sup>28</sup> Charles Issawi, *The Economic History of Turkey, 1800-1914* (Chicago, 1980), pp. 362-63.

- <sup>29</sup> Ahmad, p. 75.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 76.
- <sup>31</sup> Issawi, p. 365.
- <sup>32</sup> Ahmad, p. 62.
- <sup>33</sup> Lowther to Grey, April 20, 1909, in *BD5*, no. 218, pp. 313-19.
- <sup>34</sup> Adelson, p. 70.
- <sup>35</sup> John Presland, *Deedes Bey: A Study of Sir Wyndham Deedes* (London, 1942), pp. 81-82, 96-99. Deedes thereafter probably was the closest foreign associate of Talaat Pasha, the political leader of the Young Turks, as will be discussed in Chapter VI.
- <sup>36</sup> Geoffrey Miller, *Superior Force: The Conspiracy Behind the Escape of Goeben and Breslau* (Hull, England, 1996), p. 165.
- <sup>37</sup> e.g., Grey to Sir F. Lascelles, October 9, 1908, in *BD5*, no. 350, pp. 419-20.
- <sup>38</sup> Memorandum by Grey, November 2, 1911, in *BD9*(1), Appendix IV, p. 780.
- <sup>39</sup> *Hansard* (12 August 1913), cc. 2281-96.
- <sup>40</sup> See footnote 14 above.
- <sup>41</sup> *BD9*(2), p. xiii.
- <sup>42</sup> See p. 15.
- <sup>43</sup> Fromkin, p. 32.
- <sup>44</sup> Miller, *Straits*, p. 70.
- <sup>45</sup> James Paul Thomas, "The Sykes Picot Agreement of 1916: Its Genesis in British Policy" (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1971), p. 41; Lowther to Grey, June 6, 1913, in *BD10*(1), Appendix, p. 901.
- <sup>46</sup> Thomas, p. 50.
- <sup>47</sup> Memorandum by Crowe, "Effect of a British Evacuation of the Mediterranean on Questions of Foreign Policy," May 8, 1912, in *Policy and Operations in the Mediterranean, 1912-14*, ed. E.W.R. Lumby (London, 1970), no. 3, p. 18 (hereafter cited as Lumby).
- <sup>48</sup> Kitchener to Grey, May 19, 1912, in Lumby, no. 5, p. 20.

## BRITAIN'S FINAL NEAR EAST POLICY CHOICES

As Europe solidified its division into Triple Alliance and Triple Entente in the years before the First World War, considerations of the next war dominated each Power's foreign policy. In the British case, decision-makers faced a difficult choice in pursuing Britain's Ottoman Empire policy in the final years of peace: should Britain consider the Ottoman Empire an ally, an enemy, or a neutral? There were good arguments for each course, and as we have seen, the Turks made direct offers of alliance in 1911 and 1913. But ultimately Sir Edward Grey and the British government rejected those offers, choosing the middle course of neutrality. The following chapter will examine the logic by which they made their final choice.

Britain's first and foremost reason for rejecting a Turkish alliance was the widespread belief that the Turks had little to offer militarily. A British observer in 1910 judged the Ottoman navy unfit to cope with even the poorest European fleet, with "neither the officers to navigate and fight, nor the crews to man the ships."<sup>1</sup> Likewise, the Ottoman army had never fared well against European opponents, despite long periods of reorganization under

German supervision.<sup>2</sup> The Turks themselves recognized their poor state--one Ottoman official admitted to a British attaché that the Ottoman army needed ten years to be set in order.<sup>3</sup>

But the Turks would not get ten years in which to complete their improvements. From 1911 through 1913, Turkey was almost continually at war, and Turkish forces suffered a series of disastrous defeats that highlighted their military ineptitude. In the Tripolitanian War of 1911-1912, Italy defeated an Ottoman force in Libya, bombarded the Turks' Dardanelles forts with impunity, and, as we have seen, seized the Dodecanese Islands off the coast of Anatolia. The loss of the Dodecanese was particularly galling for the Turks, since the Italian presence there would tend to limit Turkey's reach into the Mediterranean Sea. In Constantinople, British ambassador Gerard Lowther attributed the loss to Italy to the Turks' denial of their own decrepitude, concluding:

Turkey appears to be unable to realise what is essential to her welfare is a frank and absolute abandonment of those oversea possessions which she is unable to develop or even protect, and that it is useless to endeavour to maintain a shadowy suzerainty where no practical one exists.<sup>4</sup>

Less than a month after making peace with Italy, the

Turks suffered another military disaster. In the First Balkan War, the Balkan League of Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece, and Montenegro attacked Turkish garrisons in southeastern Europe with the intention of pushing the Ottomans from the Balkans completely. The Balkan League succeeded in its purpose in less than a month, expelling the Turks from Macedonia, Thrace, and Eastern Rumelia, and taking tens of thousands of prisoners in the process. A Second Balkan War ensued a few months later, and though the Turks regained part of Thrace from Bulgaria, they lost several key islands in the Aegean to Greece, while the Bulgarian frontier was extended dangerously close to Constantinople.<sup>5</sup>

The British embassy was generally negative in its assessment of these developments. The embassy's annual report of 1913 attributed the poor performance of the Ottoman army in the Balkan Wars to an irremediable "bearing of inert dulness [which] seems to permeate all ranks." In comparison to the soldiers of the Balkan League, the report found the Turkish soldiers "utterly lacking in enthusiasm." Embassy officers also noted the Ottoman authorities' "absolute incapacity" for warfare.<sup>6</sup> Lowther believed the Turkish army's administration so incompetent that he predicted its soldiers would soon starve, while his

assistant Gerald Fitzmaurice reported in late 1912 that the Ottoman army had "fall[en] to pieces."<sup>7</sup> These reports found a receptive audience in the Foreign Office, where Sir Arthur Nicolson pronounced in 1913 that the Balkan Wars had left the Turks "thoroughly discredited as a fighting force."<sup>8</sup> The Balkan Wars clearly discounted Turkey's value as an ally in British eyes.

In Britain's prewar strategic logic, the idea of Turkey as a military non-entity was a welcome complement to the assumption that the next European war would be a short one. If Turkey could be discounted Britain could focus its resources on matters closer to home. Like those of the rest of the European Powers, Britain's war plans envisaged a brief conflict of two or three months,<sup>9</sup> and in keeping with the assumptions of the Anglo-German naval race of 1905-14, most British military experts expected the major engagements to occur at sea between the British and German fleets.

As First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill subscribed wholly to this view. His input to British foreign policy and imperial security reflected the primacy of the North Sea theater, where he insisted that Britain's maintenance of sixty percent superiority over the German

fleet was of "ultimate importance."<sup>10</sup> With German naval strength rising, Churchill believed a continued British policy of maintaining naval superiority in both the North Sea and the Mediterranean would be "extravagant, unnecessary, and unjustified."<sup>11</sup> This line of thought led Churchill to request permission from the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) to move most of Britain's Mediterranean fleet to face the German threat in home waters, leaving responsibility for Entente naval interests in the Mediterranean to France, including the naval protection of British Egypt.<sup>12</sup>

Churchill further coordinated with Lord Kitchener for an Indian expeditionary force of three to four divisions to defend Egypt in the event that the Turks should attempt to retake the country while Britain and Germany were at war.<sup>13</sup> Assuming a short war, Churchill thought there was little risk in this plan because he believed Britain could defeat the German fleet in the North Sea within a few months.<sup>14</sup> During that time, the French fleet and the Indian force would be able to secure Britain's Mediterranean interests, and once Germany was vanquished, Britain would be able to send a fleet back to the Mediterranean.<sup>15</sup> Contrarily, in a short European war, Turkey would be of no use to Britain,



for the conflict would be over before Turkey could effectively engage in it.

If the British had reasons to discount the value of a Turkish alliance, they also had good reasons to avoid one altogether. The prospect of adding Turkey to the Triple Entente presented great difficulties in view of the deep animosity between the Turks and Russians. The two groups could never resolve their differences over the Straits, especially since the Young Turk leaders considered control of the Straits essential to their empire's existence.<sup>16</sup> Lowther thought a Russo-Turkish rapprochement "extremely doubtful," because the Ottomans would have to make concessions that would result in "the exclusion of the Ottomans from Constantinople."<sup>17</sup> The French ambassador in Turkey concurred, calling the concept "a fool's paradise."<sup>18</sup> The decision-makers in London agreed; hence Grey's rejection of the Turkish offer of alliance in 1913.<sup>19</sup> When Grey spoke of turning down the Turks in order to avoid "angering the other Powers," it is likely he meant Russia foremost, for in 1913 the Triple Entente was the paramount plank in all his logic. For Grey, putting the Turks and Russians into the same alliance was simply too difficult a diplomatic feat to attempt.

Neither did the British public particularly want a Turkish alliance. Despite the general acclamation with which Britons greeted the Committee of Union and Progress in 1908, by the time of the Balkan Wars few felt much sympathy with the Young Turks' cause. To the British public and press corps, the revolutionaries appeared to have become as despotic as the regime they had displaced. Sir Edwin Pears, Britain's best-known correspondent in the region, sent reports to this effect from Constantinople. Pears pronounced that "all the old abuses continued" under the Young Turk regime, and noted, "unhappily events showed that the hopeful confidence of the Powers in Young Turkey were misplaced."<sup>20</sup> Pears thought the C.U.P. had "blundered seriously from the start" by giving the empire's administration to former officials of the Sultan, men "who knew only Hamidean methods of ruling."<sup>21</sup> He also accused the C.U.P. of murdering political opponents in its efforts to quash dissent within the empire.<sup>22</sup> The overall message from Pears, a man who had become famous with his reports on the Bulgarian atrocities of 1876, was that nothing had changed in Turkey.

Whereas Pears indicted Turkey's leaders, other British correspondents stressed the brutality of the

Ottoman army in the Balkan Wars. The *Economist* cited reports from Constantinople of the Turks' "inhumanity" in the conflict, even to their own wounded, who were allegedly generally left to die.<sup>23</sup> Noel Buxton, a Liberal Member of Parliament and head of the government's Balkan Committee, visited field hospitals in the war-torn region in early 1913 and reported that the Turks had "committed a breach of primary international honour" by using explosive dum-dum bullets, guaranteed to inflict brutal wounds to their enemies.<sup>24</sup>

The tenor of these reports was that Turkish men at arms remained as vicious as their predecessors had been, especially in their treatment of Christians. This theme seems to have dominated the British press' reporting and commentary on the Ottoman Empire in the immediate prewar years. The spectre of the Bulgarian and Armenian massacres never left the popular consciousness in Britain, and British missionaries to Ottoman lands perennially sent back vivid accounts of the continued persecution of Christians there.<sup>25</sup> Britons were outraged and held the Young Turk regime responsible when further massacres took place in Armenia in 1912. The *Economist* called Turkish rule over non-Muslims a story of "extortion and oppression, varied by

massacres," while Pears contributed to the debate by claiming the "Turkish mentality" was "incompeten[t] to govern Christians justly."<sup>26</sup>

These voices universally supported the Balkan League's quest to expel the Ottomans from Europe. Herbert Vivian, another Briton well known as a Balkan correspondent, told his readers the "Ottoman ashes" left by the Balkan League should be swept away "into a pit, out of sight and out of mind," in order to inaugurate "a bag-and-baggage policy beyond Gladstonian dreams."<sup>27</sup> Vivian, Pears, Buxton, and the Manchester *Guardian's* popular Balkan reporter Edith Durham both reflected and informed British opinion at the exact time Ottoman ministers were seeking an alliance with Britain. In considering the Turkish offer, Grey and the government cannot have failed to see the anti-Turkish mood around them.

In keeping with the public's preference for Christians over Turks in the Balkans, a significant portion of the public and Foreign Office favored an alignment with Greece over a Turkish alliance. From the outbreak of the Balkan Wars, the British government had sympathized with Greece, and at war's end Grey supported the Greeks' claim to almost all of the Ottoman islands in the Aegean.<sup>28</sup> The

Greeks had offered Britain an alliance before, and the charismatic Eleutherios Venizelos, Greece's Anglophile Prime Minister, was a much more palatable friend than the C.U.P. junta.<sup>29</sup> Since Greece and Turkey were at war for most of 1912-1913, an Anglo-Greek agreement and an Anglo-Turkish alliance would have been mutually exclusive.

Yet these several motivations against concluding an alliance with the Turks did not mean the British were anxious to turn Turkey into an enemy. Notwithstanding Foreign Office assumptions about Ottoman military weakness, some officials in Britain's military establishment remained wary of the threat Turkey might pose to the British Empire. Grey had articulated the importance of the lines of imperial communication in 1912, telling the CID,

If our communications are cut it is obvious that the Empire falls to pieces, because the different parts of the Empire would then be isolated; and if we once lost command of the sea, so that the communications between ourselves and the self-governing Dominions and other parts of the Empire were interrupted and broken, it is very doubtful whether we should ever come together again.<sup>30</sup>

This warning was especially applicable to the Suez Canal, which the War Office predicted would be lost in two or three months should Turkey attack Egypt while Britain was engaged in a European war, as Churchill and Kitchener

believed she might.<sup>31</sup> By taking Egypt, the Turks would instantly separate Britain from India due to the distance of the Cape Horn route around South Africa, which would be a tremendous setback for the empire. Before his compromise with Churchill, Kitchener told Grey of the danger that war with both the Triple Alliance and Turkey would bring to Egypt and India:

Egypt would thus become, not only a connecting link with India, but one of India's outposts in case of war, which she would be obliged to defend; and wireless communication between India and Egypt would be a matter of supreme importance .... A successful invasion of Egypt by land by a Turkish army would be a most serious blow to our position here, and one that would give us grave internal trouble.<sup>32</sup>

Kitchener was also concerned about the Turkish threat to the Persian Gulf, and he planned for another Indian expeditionary force to defend British interests there and in Mesopotamia if war should come.<sup>33</sup> The site of huge petroleum reserves, the Gulf had taken on greater value when the British navy began to modernize from coal- to oil-burning ships.<sup>34</sup>

Perhaps because of his awareness of the Gulf's value to his navy, among the government's leaders Churchill alone seemed fully to grasp the damage the Turks could do to Britain. He had disagreed with Grey's dismissal of the

Turkish offer of alliance during the Tripolitanian War, saying,

The [Turkish] proposition ought not to be lightly pushed aside. We must ask ourselves whether we have not more to gain from Turkish friendship than from Italian policy; and still more whether we have not more to apprehend from the consequence of throwing T[urkey] than of throwing Italy into the arms of Germany. *T[urkey] is the greatest land weapon wh[ich] the Germans c[oul]d use ag[ain]st us [emphasis added].*<sup>35</sup>

In making this assessment, Churchill envisioned the Turks' part in a Balkan pincer movement or an attack on Egypt. But as Muslims the Turks also posed a less tangible threat, one the Foreign Office took more seriously than it did the Turkish army. Officials in London had long feared the authority the Sultan, as Caliph, might exercise over Britain's Muslim subjects in India and Africa. Sir Arthur Nicolson in particular worried about the "Pan-Islamic" threat, telling a colleague,

It would be curious if, in this twentieth century, we witnessed a revival of the Ottoman Empire of the seventeenth century, and there is the additional danger that it would be able to utilize the enormous Mussulman population under the rule of Christian countries. I think that this Pan-Islamic movement is one of our greatest dangers in the future...<sup>36</sup>

Grey, too, was mindful of the effect that a British war with Turkey would have on Muslims in India, where the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857 lingered in the British memory as

proof of the danger native revolts posed to the empire.

Grey wrote later that on the eve of the First World War,

An Indian personage of very high position and influence in the Moslem world came to see me. He urged earnestly that Turkey should be kept out of the war: if we were at war with Turkey it might cause great trouble for Moslem British subjects and be a source of embarrassment both to them and to us. I replied that we all felt this, and desired not to be in war with Turkey ...<sup>37</sup>

While Grey and Nicolson took the Muslim threat under diplomatic advisement, Lord Kitchener took action. He considered the Pan-Islamic threat to Egypt a potent one, having seen a Muslim uprising firsthand in the Sudan, where the Mahdi's fanatic followers convinced him of Islam's potential to organize resistance to British force.<sup>38</sup> In the event of war, Kitchener believed the Turkish government would direct the Sultan-Caliph to declare a *jihad* against the British.<sup>39</sup> Consequently, he proposed to remove the Muslim threat to Britain by removing the Caliphate from the Ottomans. In 1912, when the Balkan League embarrassed Turkey, Kitchener related to Grey that Muslims in Egypt had remarked, "If the Turks cannot maintain themselves in Europe by force of arms, they have no right to rule Islam."<sup>40</sup> In the final years of peace, Kitchener pondered circumventing the Sultan by installing a new, Arab caliph



more amenable to the British. He consequently opened a dialogue with Sherif Hussein, the Emir of Mecca, laying the groundwork for the Arab revolt of 1916.<sup>41</sup>

Despite Kitchener's many war plans, and considering the reasons for and against an alliance with Turkey, the British government on the whole favored the status quo: keeping Turkey as a friendly neutral in the event of war. For there were good arguments in favor of the status quo. As Churchill had pointed out to the CID in 1912, the opening of a Turkish theater would drain seapower and manpower that the British could not spare from the all-important North Sea theater. Likewise, maintaining the status quo in Turkey meant preserving Britain's Near Eastern spheres of influence.

Perhaps most importantly, however, preserving the status quo meant preserving Britain's and France's substantial economic interests in the Ottoman Empire. As previously discussed, British and French-owned railways criss-crossed Anatolia, the Levant, and Mesopotamia. The Entente countries' finance houses also had much to lose in the event of war: by 1914 half of the Ottoman government's financing came from French loans, while the Ottoman public debt administration had become a significant money-maker

for European investors.<sup>42</sup> War with Turkey would mean the instant loss of these revenues.

Britain also had its uncomfortable position of relative industrial decline to consider. In 1912-1914, while most of Britain experienced a business downturn and severe labor unrest, English shipyards were busily constructing the Dreadnoughts *Osman* and *Reshadieh* for the Ottoman government (see photos in appendix).<sup>43</sup> Since the Turks had no sufficient facilities for harboring the ships in Constantinople, the Ottoman government had engaged the huge English firm of Armstrong Whitworth to build a new set of docks in Constantinople. The project, which promised steady construction work for thirty years, was particularly important for the British economy because Armstrong Whitworth, one of the ten largest companies in the world, showed serious signs of weakness in 1914.<sup>44</sup> On the whole, British industry would surely suffer in the event of war with the Ottoman Empire.

By early 1914, Britain was set on a policy of maintaining friendly neutrality with the Ottoman Empire. Grey and the British government had twice rejected an alliance with the Turks, whom they generally considered too weak a military power to benefit Britain, especially in a

war as short as the British expected the next one to be. In addition, Britain's friendly relationships with Russia and Greece, Turkey's most significant opponents, tended to prohibit an Anglo-Turkish alliance. Neither was British public opinion disposed toward an alliance with a Muslim state that was warring with Christians in the Balkans and massacring them in Armenia. British journalists reporting on the Balkans preferred to treat the Turks as enemies who had lost their rights of sovereignty outside of Anatolia.

Yet Grey dared not lean too far toward hostility to Turkey. As Churchill, Kitchener, and Nicolson were aware, the Turks could still threaten British interests in the Near East, either by force or by the religious power vested in the Sultan as Caliph. While Kitchener formed war plans to protect Egypt and India from Turkish attack or *jihād*, British investors hoped to avoid war in the Ottoman Empire altogether. In economic terms, the lucrative Ottoman market made the status quo more appealing than the alternatives.

Viewed from London, the policy of maintaining friendly neutrality should have been rather simple to bring to fruition. But in the final crisis that led to the First World War, the world would discover that the Young Turks

had their own decision-making process based on concerns and objectives that British representatives in the Near East did not understand. As a result, leaders in Britain would take important decisions while utterly detached from Ottoman reality.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Minute by H.C. Norman, War Office, September 12, 1910, *BD9(1)*, no. 177, p. 202.

<sup>2</sup> e.g., the advisory missions of Colmar von der Goltz, 1884-96, and Liman von Sanders, 1913-1916. Both men became operational commanders of the Ottoman army during the First World War.

<sup>3</sup> Mr. F.O. Lindley to Grey, January 5, 1911, in *BD9(1)*, no. 208, pp. 245-46.

<sup>4</sup> Lowther, Annual Report on Turkey for the Year 1911, in *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, "B" 20:305.

<sup>5</sup> Talaat Pasha, "Posthumous Memoirs of Talaat Pasha," *New York Times Current History* 15 (1921-22): 289.

<sup>6</sup> H.D. Beaumont, Annual Report on Turkey for the Year 1913, December 4, 1914, in *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, "B" 20:437.

<sup>7</sup> Lowther to Nicolson, October 24, 1912, in *BD9(2)*, no. 60, pp. 47-48; memorandum by Fitzmaurice, November 26, 1912, in *BD9(2)*, no. 287, pp. 210-13.

<sup>8</sup> Nicolson to Sir Fairfax Cartwright, March 17, 1913, in *BD9(2)*, no. 728, pp. 596-97.

<sup>9</sup> Bernadotte E. Schmidt and Harold C. Vedeler, *The World in the Crucible, 1914-1919* (New York, 1984), p. 34.

<sup>10</sup> Minutes of the Committee of Imperial Defence, Meeting of July 4, 1912, Cab. 38/21/26, quoted in Thomas, p. 72.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 77-85, as discussed in Chapter IV above.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>14</sup> David Fromkin to author, October 30, 2001.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas, pp. 57-58.

<sup>16</sup> Lowther to Grey, 21 August 1890, in *BD9*(1), no. 46, p. 53.

<sup>17</sup> Lowther to Grey, in *BD9*(1), no. 336, pp. 340-41.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> See p. 53.

<sup>20</sup> Sir Edwin Pears, "The Crisis in Turkey," *Contemporary Review* 102 (1912): 611, 614.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 613.

<sup>22</sup> Pears, "The Situation in Turkey," *Contemporary Review* 101 (1912): 761.

<sup>23</sup> *Economist* 76 (8 February 1913): 270.

<sup>24</sup> Hon. Noel Buxton, "The Wounded," *Contemporary Review* 103 (1913): 158. Strangely, Buxton was wounded by an assassin during a trip to the Balkans the following year.

<sup>25</sup> Selim Deringil, "The Invention of Tradition as Public Image in the Late Ottoman Empire, 1808 to 1898," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 35, no. 1 (January 1993): 13.

<sup>26</sup> *Economist* 76 (4 May 1912): 966; Pears, "Christians and Islam in Turkey," *The Nineteenth Century* 73 (1913): 290.

<sup>27</sup> Herbert Vivian, "Turkey's Asiatic Problems," *Fortnightly Review* 99 (1913): 672. Vivian served as a Balkans correspondent for the *Daily Express* and later trained Allied troops in Macedonia during the war.

<sup>28</sup> Heller, *British Policy Towards the Ottoman Empire*, p. 116; Nicolson to Hardinge, October 29, 1913, in *BD10*(1), no. 59, pp. 50-51.

<sup>29</sup> F.R. Bridge, "Relations with Austria-Hungary and the Balkan States, 1905-1908," in *British Foreign Policy Under Sir Edward Grey*, ed. F.H. Hinsley (Cambridge, 1977), p. 166.

<sup>30</sup> Minutes of the Committee of Imperial Defence, July 11, 1912, Cab. 38/20/27, quoted in Thomas, p. 42.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas, p. 62.

<sup>32</sup> Kitchener to Grey, May 19, 1912, in Lumby, no. 5, p. 20.

<sup>33</sup> S.A. Cohen, "The Genesis of the British Campaign in Mesopotamia, 1914," *Middle Eastern Studies* 12 (1976): 119-120.

<sup>34</sup> Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume 2*, pt. 3, p. 1964.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill* (Boston, 1971), vol. 3, 1914-1916: *The Challenge of War*, p. 189; emphasis added.

<sup>36</sup> Nicolson to Sir Fairfax Cartwright, November 1, 1911, quoted in Heller, *British Policy Towards the Ottoman Empire*, p. 39.

<sup>37</sup> Grey, 2:170.

<sup>38</sup> McKale, p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> Though his fears of a widespread anti-British Muslim effort were unfounded, Kitchener was proved correct in anticipating the Ottoman proclamation of a *jihad* against the British in November 1914; see Geoffrey Lewis, "The Ottoman Proclamation of *Jihad* in 1914," *Islamic Quarterly* 19 (Fall 1975): 157.

<sup>40</sup> Kitchener to Grey, November 3, 1912, in *BD9*(2), no. 113, pp. 88-89.

<sup>41</sup> Rashid Khalidi, *British Policy Towards Syria and Palestine, 1906-1914* (London, 1980), p. 332.

<sup>42</sup> A.L. Macfie, *The End of the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1923* (London, 1998), p. 110.

<sup>43</sup> Chris B. Rooney, "The International Significance of British Naval Missions to the Ottoman Empire, 1908-14," *Middle Eastern Studies* 34 (January 1998): 12. Churchill requisitioned the ships on the eve of the First World War, as will be discussed below.

<sup>44</sup> R.J. Irving, "New Industries for Old? Some Investment Decisions of Sir W.G. Armstrong, Whitworth & Co. Ltd., 1900-1914," *Business History* 17, no. 2 (1975): 150.

## PRELUDE AND CRISIS, 1914

As the armies of the Triple Entente and Triple Alliance clashed on the battlefields of Europe in the autumn of 1914, the British government and public were stunned by news from the Near East. The Ottoman Empire had sided with the Central Powers, and had bombarded Russia's Black Sea ports. What was more, an Ottoman army was apparently massing for a march on the Suez Canal.

The breach between the British and Ottoman Empires raised some questions. Since Britain's aim had been to keep the Turks in a state of friendly neutrality, the decision-makers in London must somehow have misjudged the Young Turk decision-makers in Constantinople. As we shall see, in the crucial prewar years, British officials in Constantinople consistently provided their superiors in London with misinformed views of the Young Turk regime, while those same superiors formed and retained invalid assumptions about the Ottoman state. As a result, the British government rarely had an accurate picture of what was truly unfolding in the Ottoman Empire and failed to take steps to prevent the two countries from descending into war.

One significant reason for London's misjudgment of the Turkish government is that British diplomats misunderstood the composition and objectives of the Committee of Union and Progress from the start. With very little information on the Young Turk organization, and scant interest in it as well, the Foreign Office had been surprised by their revolution of 1908. Pressed for information on the new regime, the embassy in Constantinople had little to give. The Foreign Office had to look to the British embassy in Paris, where some of the Young Turks had lived and worked in exile, for an assessment of the revolutionaries.<sup>1</sup> The Paris embassy's report said nothing about the Young Turks' anxiety over the Anglo-Russian meeting at Reval, and instead listed their primary aims as the ouster of Britain from Egypt and the furtherance of Pan-Islamism.<sup>2</sup>

The Paris report was a distortion of the C.U.P.'s real character that subsequent reports from Turkey did not dispel. As months passed and the Constantinople embassy provided its own detailed reports on the C.U.P., senior embassy officers painted a strange picture. Because the initial uprising occurred in Salonica, a city whose



population was approximately half-Jewish, Chief Dragoman Gerald Fitzmaurice assumed Jews controlled the entire C.U.P. movement.<sup>3</sup> Because Salonica had a few sizeable Masonic lodges, Fitzmaurice also assumed the C.U.P. was comprised of Freemasons. He convinced Ambassador Gerard Lowther of these theories, and in correspondence with London Lowther began to refer to the C.U.P. as "the Jew Committee of Union and Progress."<sup>4</sup>

In May 1910, after a two-year investigation of the C.U.P.'s activities, Fitzmaurice and Lowther reported their bizarre conclusions to the Foreign Office. In a 5,000-word despatch to Sir Charles Hardinge based entirely on a report written by Fitzmaurice, Lowther claimed that Jewish Freemasons controlled "all the pivotal points in the machinery of the Young Turkey Government," and aimed above all to fulfill the Zionist dream of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine.<sup>5</sup> Lowther also reported that the Young Turks were funded by Jewish financiers throughout Europe who intended to take over the Turkish economy.<sup>6</sup> With practically no apparent basis, he painstakingly identified each Young Turk leader by name as either "Crypto-Jew," or Freemason, or both. Lowther constructed several fantastic, wide-ranging conspiracy theories in his report, including

one based on the threat of a "Jewish Mason" who appeared at the British embassy demanding a letter of introduction to Sir John Eldon Gorst, the British Consul-General in Egypt. When Lowther rejected the demand, the man

adopted a defiant tone, and declared that this case of crying injustice must be remedied; that the highest influences in the world, including that of Jewish members of the House of Lords, would be brought to bear; and that, if necessary, measures would be taken to bring about the downfall of the Egyptian Government, and the British position in Egypt would be compromised.

Lowther naively added that the man "was not a lunatic," but rather "spoke in very measured tones."<sup>7</sup> The fact that Lowther took this threat seriously and duly relayed it to the Foreign Office is evidence of what one historian calls Lowther's "extreme credulity" and "tenuous hold on reality."<sup>8</sup> For five years, Lowther and Fitzmaurice plied the British government with similar conspiracy theories and misinformation respecting the Young Turks and events in the Ottoman Empire in general. Lowther's annual reports to the Foreign Office perennially stressed the "shroud of mystery" and "spurious Freemasonry" with which the C.U.P. leaders surrounded themselves.<sup>9</sup>

Among his other conspiracy theories, Lowther claimed the Young Turks were trying to undermine the British Empire by spreading Pan-Islamism to lands as far away as Algeria

and Persia,<sup>10</sup> an idea which, as we have seen, was also held by Sir Arthur Nicolson of the Foreign Office.<sup>11</sup> In the same breath, however, Lowther reported that the Young Turks were driven by the contradictory force of ultra-patriotic Turkish nationalism.<sup>12</sup> The ambassador and his Dragoman appeared willing to believe whatever plots were communicated to them, however unlikely and however inconsistent with other plots they had already attributed to the Young Turks.

Since Lowther's arrival in Constantinople coincided almost exactly with that of the Young Turks, his mistaken notions of the C.U.P. government filled the Foreign Office's vacuum of information on the Ottoman government. There are clear indications that British foreign policy makers gave credence to the Lowther-Fitzmaurice view. After reading Lowther's despatch of 29 May 1910, Hardinge called it "most interesting reading" and forwarded it to the India Office, the Egyptian Government, and the British embassy in Teheran.<sup>13</sup>

Aside from reporting on the web of Young Turk conspiracy, Lowther unerringly portrayed the C.U.P.'s actions in Constantinople in a negative light, from the very early days of the Young Turk regime. "I was at once

struck with the impression that the [C.U.P.] lacked responsible leaders of position," he wrote Grey a few weeks after the revolt, and added, "It seems too much to believe that they will, for long, be able to live up to their motto of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity."<sup>14</sup> This mention of the motto of the French Revolution highlights another of Lowther's pet themes. He later reported that the Young Turks had been "imitating the French Revolution and its godless and levelling methods," explaining ingenuously that this was partly due to the fact that "French is the one European language extensively spread in the Levant."<sup>15</sup> Above all, Lowther and Fitzmaurice stressed the despotic nature of the Young Turk regime, essentially equating it with that of the hated Abdul Hamid.<sup>16</sup> In all likelihood, this misinformation, based on little more than these men's imaginations, influenced Grey, who later wrote, "Those who knew Turkey well warned us that the 'Young' Turks ... were much like the 'old' Turks," with Lowther and Fitzmaurice presumably "those who knew Turkey well."<sup>17</sup>

In their regular dealings with the C.U.P., British officials in Turkey tended to treat them with condescension. On more than one occasion Lowther referred to the Young Turks as "children," while Fitzmaurice likened

them in a political sense to "a 2 year old infant that can't walk firmly."<sup>18</sup> In another instance, the British resident at Baghdad, having met the C.U.P.'s local emissaries at an exclusive dinner, reported that they "strike one as being a little vulgar," and noted that they belonged to a lower social class than the rest of the party.<sup>19</sup>

Lowther and Fitzmaurice also displayed a degree of racialism toward the Young Turks. Speaking of Gabriel Effendi, the Ottoman Minister for Foreign Affairs in 1912, Lowther told Nicolson, "He is, as you know, an Armenian, and therefore not distinguished for courage."<sup>20</sup> For his part, Fitzmaurice predicted that the Young Turks would eventually lose control of the empire to non-Muslims because Muslims were "almost entirely devoid of business aptitudes."<sup>21</sup> The British embassy officers' unfriendly tone won them no friends among the C.U.P., who had not forgotten that Lowther had supported Abdul Hamid's unsuccessful counter-coup attempt in 1909.<sup>22</sup> Fitzmaurice reprised this behavior in 1913, to the Young Turks' great annoyance, when he and the British military attaché in Constantinople actually helped the leaders of a failed coup attempt escape from the country.<sup>23</sup>

In the years before the First World War, the prejudicial Lowther-Fitzmaurice view of the Ottoman government only strengthened the anti-Turk tendency that had grown in London since the days of Lord Salisbury.<sup>24</sup> In the highest circle of government, Winston Churchill alone seemed immune to this trend, probably because he alone among cabinet ministers had personally met the most powerful leaders of the C.U.P. and formed his own impression of them.<sup>25</sup>

In actuality, the Young Turks were not Freemasons or Zionists, but rather nationalists who above all wanted to preserve the Ottoman Empire. The British embassy could have learned this fact at any time simply by asking Wyndham Deedes, the young British officer seconded to the Ottoman Gendarmerie since 1910. By late 1913, Deedes knew the Young Turk leaders intimately, having risen to one of the highest posts in the Interior Ministry.<sup>26</sup> He certainly could have disabused Lowther and Fitzmaurice of their notion of the Young Turks as Zionists; he later became a fervent Zionist himself and could have been expected in 1913 to recognize that the C.U.P. leaders were not. But there is no indication that any British officials in the Near East ever addressed these questions to Deedes. Months

into the conflict, General Sir Francis Wingate, commander of British troops in the region, was blaming the war on "a syndicate of Jews, financiers, and low-born intriguers" in Constantinople.<sup>27</sup>

Even without Deedes' input, however, British officials should have seen the outward signs of the C.U.P.'s nationalistic character. After all, Fitzmaurice knew the C.U.P. had launched its revolt in July 1908 partly from the fear that Britain and Russia had arranged Turkey's partition at Reval.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, since taking power the Young Turks had vainly fought two bloody wars to keep their European territory, despite advice from the Great Powers to simply let Ottoman Europe go over to the Balkan League quietly.<sup>29</sup> Having lost Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Eastern Rumelia, and part of Thrace, the C.U.P. wanted desperately to get those lands back, along with the Aegean and Dodecanese islands Turkey had lost. In a humiliating turn of events, Salonica, site of the C.U.P.'s first uprising of 1908, and lost to the Greeks in the First Balkan War, was not even a Turkish city anymore.

The Young Turks consistently pursued a policy in the prewar years of trying to recover as much Ottoman territory as possible, not just in Europe, but also throughout the

Empire. Displaying a certain degree of xenophobia, the C.U.P. intended eventually to push the Europeans out of the empire and restore their state to its former glory.<sup>30</sup> As a result, Grey's advice that the Turks be satisfied with their Asian territories fell on deaf ears. The French, meanwhile, seemed less confused about what the Young Turks actually wanted to accomplish, noting with alarm the Ottoman government's "hostility to foreign capital" and foreign institutions throughout the empire.<sup>31</sup>

And in truth, the Young Turks feared and resented the Triple Entente's intentions in the Ottoman Empire. Like Abdul Hamid, the C.U.P. resented Britain's presence in Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf. Unlike Abdul Hamid, they seemed prepared to do something about it. In 1912, after years of Ottoman docility, the Young Turks caused the Foreign Office great consternation by demanding the right to police the Gulf alongside the British navy. They also insisted upon establishing an Ottoman outpost on the Gulf island of Bubiyan, near Kuwait, and objected to Britain's control of Kuwait itself.<sup>32</sup> Though the Turks eventually modified these demands, they simultaneously rejected an Anglo-French proposal that would have given the Triple Entente a majority holding in the Baghdad Railway,



insisting that Russia be excluded from the venture completely.<sup>33</sup>

The Young Turks distrusted the Entente's intentions in Ottoman Europe as well. After the Reval meeting, Turkish diplomats consistently questioned the British on their negotiations with Russia respecting the Straits.<sup>34</sup> According to Djemal Pasha, the Ottoman Minister of the Marine during the First World War (see appendix), by 1913 the Young Turks assumed that France and Britain had already promised the Straits to the Russians, whom the Young Turks knew "considered themselves as the natural heirs to Constantinople."<sup>35</sup>

As the Young Turks also knew, however, Russia was not the only party that coveted Constantinople and the Straits. The Greeks aimed to dominate the eastern Mediterranean and the Straits, and in 1911 began building a navy that would enable them do so. They purchased a dreadnought from German shipbuilders, and sought to buy more from the United States.<sup>36</sup> Alarmed, the Turkish government joined this miniature naval race by contracting for a dreadnought, to be called the *Reshadieh*, from the Vickers shipyard in England.<sup>37</sup> In addition, when the half-completed *Rio de Janeiro*, a dreadnought abandoned by Brazil in the Armstrong

yards, became available, Greece and Turkey entered into a vicious bidding war.<sup>38</sup> With the timely assistance of French financiers, the Turks ultimately won the rights to the ship and renamed it the *Sultan Osman*. It was to be the largest battleship in the world, with 30,000 tons of displacement and fourteen 12-inch guns.<sup>39</sup> *Sultan Osman* and *Reshadieh* promised to give Turkey a decisive naval edge over Greece. The Turkish government was naturally upset, then, when Vickers and Armstrong's, doubting the reliability of Turkey's finances, temporarily stopped work on the Turkish ships during the Balkan Wars.<sup>40</sup> Though work was eventually restarted, this instance bred further anti-British resentment among the Young Turk leaders, some of whom had long believed Britain would never allow them to obtain a potent navy.<sup>41</sup>

Although the Young Turk revolt initially displaced the Germans from their position of influence with the Porte, Turkey's seat of government, British observers soon perceived a return to the *status quo ante*. With so many of the Entente's interests running counter to those of the Turks, and in view of the fact that the most influential Young Turk army officers had trained with Germany's army, the Foreign Office assumed Germany had the Ottoman

government at least partially in its thrall. Two years after the revolt, Hardinge concluded that British influence in Turkey was "greatly dwindling" as that of Germany grew.<sup>42</sup> Another Foreign Office official, Louis Mallet (see appendix), who later became Britain's ambassador in Constantinople, told Nicolson and Grey, "There can be no doubt that Germany is making every endeavour to draw Turkey within the orbit of the Central Powers."<sup>43</sup> By the end of 1910, Grey and Nicolson pessimistically agreed with him.<sup>44</sup>

For the rest of the prewar period, the British worried that the Turks were close to joining the Triple Alliance. Thus, at the outbreak of the Tripolitanian War in 1911, Churchill predicted the war would "throw Turkey into German arms more than ever."<sup>45</sup> In Egypt, Kitchener, too, assumed the Germans exercised control in Turkey. From 1912 to 1914 he was constantly concerned that Germany could control the Ottoman Caliphate and use it against Britain.<sup>46</sup>

While it is true that Germany tended to court the C.U.P.'s favor, the British were wrong to think the Turks might be under German sway. The C.U.P. was not so much pro-German as it was opportunistic. As Talaat Pasha (see appendix), the Young Turks' Grand Vizier during the First World War, explained,

From the beginning of the revolution of 1907 [sic] down to the Balkan war, Turkey had no definite foreign policy. One day a pro-English feeling would prevail at the Porte, the next we would turn toward Germany. We were in a hesitating state, not knowing where to go, whose hand to shake. We followed the exigencies of the hour, trying to be equally good to all the European powers.<sup>47</sup>

According to Talaat, the Young Turks did not favor Germany until "England turned her back on the Porte" by denying Turkey's request for assistance during the Second Balkan War.<sup>48</sup> Djemal Pasha made the same point, but used more vivid terms. He claimed that "English policy threw off the mask and showed its true face" when Britain threw its sympathy to the Balkan League in 1913. Djemal called Grey's stance during the Balkan Wars "utterly hostile to the Turkish government," and claimed Britain's object was "to make full use of the obstacles in the way of the internal consolidation of Turkey."<sup>49</sup> While these accounts, written after Talaat and Djemal had finished on the losing side of the First World War, must be taken as apologia to some extent, they do illustrate the idea that the C.U.P. had its own interests in mind, and were not simply the German puppets the British presumed them to be.

Even without the benefit of Talaat's and Djemal's accounts, Britain's assumptions of German influence seem to

have missed one crucial point. If the Turks were under German sway, why then did they approach Britain with offers of alliance in 1911 and 1913? In fact, between 1911 and 1914, the Young Turk government made overtures of one kind or another to *all* the Great Powers except Austria-Hungary. As their European territory was whittled away, the Turks became increasingly anxious to secure any Great Power ally who could guarantee the Ottoman Empire's security against the other Powers.

But before the outbreak of the First World War, no Power thought the Turks a partner worth the encumbrances an alliance with them entailed. Just as the British Foreign Office had discounted Turkey's military utility, Karl von Wangenheim, Germany's ambassador in Constantinople, labeled Turkey "worthless as an ally."<sup>50</sup> He took this position even though Germany gained extensive influence over the Ottoman army in 1913 through the appointment of Liman von Sanders, a German general under contract to reorganize the Turkish forces. Wangenheim's view prevailed in Berlin until the very outbreak of war in August 1914, when the Kaiser personally ordered him to secure a Turco-German alliance.<sup>51</sup>

Spurned by both Britain and Germany in 1913, the

Young Turks next attempted a rapprochement with Russia in May 1914, a mere three months before the start of the European war. This move truly revealed the extent of the Turks' desperation, for Russia was the particular power from which the Turks believed they most needed protection. At the time of the approach to Russia, Talaat described the Ottoman Empire's situation as that

of a man in a forest beset by robbers. He would willingly give up his clothes, his money, his goods and his chattels, if only his life and perhaps his shirt were saved.<sup>52</sup>

This "robbing" would be implicit in any Turco-Russian alliance, since Russia would only enter such an agreement if it brought some measure of Russian control of the Dardanelles.<sup>53</sup> Even so, the Russians declined to enter an alliance with Turkey, concluding as the other Powers had that the Turks had nothing to offer that the Powers could not obtain for themselves after the Ottoman Empire's assuredly eventual collapse.<sup>54</sup>

Undeterred, and even more anxious after the assassination of Franz Ferdinand in June 1914, the Young Turks approached France with an offer of alliance in the second week of July 1914. Caught up in the July crisis and occupied by strategic arrangements with Russia, the French

declined the offer as had Britain, Germany, and Russia before them.<sup>55</sup>

The Turks' flurry of alliance offers seems to have entirely escaped the notice of Britain's representatives in Constantinople, who also failed to grasp the extent of the Young Turks' insecurity, and certainly relayed no sign of it to London. Sir Louis Mallet, who replaced Lowther in late 1913, blithely wrote that Anglo-Turkish relations were at their best since the time of the Young Turk revolution.<sup>56</sup> His reports to the Foreign Office exuded optimism for the Anglo-Turkish relationship, and he claimed that theories of Turkish hostility had been "disproved over and over again."<sup>57</sup> He had only recently come to these conclusions, however. Mallet's mood as ambassador represented a curious turnabout from his assessments as a senior Foreign Office official just the year before. It was he who counseled Grey to reject the Ottoman offer of alliance in 1913, calling the overture not "within practical politics" since an Anglo-Turkish alliance would "unite Europe against us and be a source of weakness and danger to ourselves and Turkey."<sup>58</sup> Mallet initially viewed his posting to Constantinople as a sort of dead end for his career, reflecting glumly that he would probably "be classed as a

failure like every other ambassador since [Stratford Canning]."<sup>59</sup>

In July of 1914, however, Mallet felt quite confident about Britain's relations with the Young Turk government. Just days after the Turks had offered their services to France, as the European Powers moved through the Austro-Serbian crisis toward war, a blissfully ignorant Mallet left Constantinople for a month-long holiday in England. On 18 July, two days after Mallet's departure, the Young Turks opened alliance negotiations with Germany once more.

Mallet was not alone in his failure to recognize the seriousness of the situation. Admiral Arthur Limpus, the Royal Navy officer who commanded the British naval mission to the Ottoman Empire, seemed equally ignorant of the possibility of war with the Turks. Limpus had accepted command of the entire Ottoman Navy in 1912 at the behest of Winston Churchill. Over the next two years, he strove to improve the Turks' naval structure and firepower, and instituted a number of reorganizations in the Turkish squadrons. He had also been instrumental in persuading the Turkish government to engage Armstrong's to build the extensive new set of docks in Constantinople for the *Sultan Osman* and *Reshadieh*. An apolitical man, Limpus was



disgusted to discover that British officials in London celebrated the dock construction contract as a victory in the competition for concessions in Constantinople, and not for the "tremendous gain" it would bring to the Ottoman Navy.<sup>60</sup>

Nevertheless, the Admiral remained optimistic. He predicted that the new Dreadnoughts and the contract for the Turkish docks would secure Britain's influence in the Ottoman navy "for thirty years."<sup>61</sup> As Mallet went on holiday in July 1914, Limpus prepared for the arrival of the *Sultan Osman* and *Reshadieh* from England, scheduled for the middle of August. He left Constantinople on 27 July to meet the *Sultan Osman* and *Reshadieh* at the Dardanelles, and then escort them to the Golden Horn, Constantinople's harbor, where the rest of the fleet would be waiting to open a week of ceremonies and demonstrations intended to be the British naval mission's moment of triumph.<sup>62</sup>

But the ships never arrived. At the Admiralty in London, Winston Churchill decided to requisition the *Sultan Osman* and the *Reshadieh* for the Royal Navy's use in the impending war with Germany. The day after Limpus left Constantinople to meet the ships, Churchill directed Prince Louis of Battenberg, the First Sea Lord, to set out plans

to incorporate the ships into the Royal Navy, and the following day, 29 July, instructed the shipbuilders not to let the vessels depart the shipyards.<sup>63</sup> With Turkish crews standing by to sail the ships to Turkey, British troops boarded the *Sultan Osman* and *Reshadieh* on 30 July with orders to "put all difficulties in the way of hoisting the [Turkish] flag," in order to preempt any Turkish claim to the vessels as sovereign Ottoman territory.<sup>64</sup> Two days later, Churchill made the confiscation official, ordering Admiral Sir Archibald Moore, the Third Sea Lord, to notify the shipbuilders of the Admiralty's intention to purchase the ships for the Royal Navy.<sup>65</sup>

The ostensible logic of Churchill's decision had to do with the strategic importance of the naval balance in the North Sea. As we have seen, Churchill and many others considered Britain's ability to defeat the German fleet in the North Sea theater the *sine qua non* of British national security policy. At the war's outset, Britain's superiority over Germany in Dreadnoughts stood at seven. The two Turkish battleships would increase the edge to eight or nine, depending on how the ships were deployed, and thus might provide greater assurance of victory in Britain's home waters. For Churchill, the issue of

relations with Turkey was secondary to this consideration. In this light, according to the American historian David Fromkin,

The Middle East counted for nothing in the eyes of Europeans. It made no difference at all to them whether Turkey entered the war or not .... Churchill believed the war could be waged and won in a few weeks, and he thought the Dreadnoughts he requisitioned might make the difference between victory and defeat. So almost any risk would be worth taking to get hold of those ships.<sup>66</sup>

The British public seemed to agree with this line of thinking. When news of the requisition broke, Churchill became a national hero for a time. On 12 August, the *Tatler* printed a photograph of the First Lord with the caption, "BRAVO WINSTON! The Rapid Naval Mobilisation and Purchase of the Two Foreign Dreadnoughts Spoke Volumes for Your Work and Wisdom."<sup>67</sup>

The Foreign Office, meanwhile, seemed content to defer to Churchill's handling of the situation. On the same day the shipbuilders were ordered to keep the Turkish flag from being raised, Sir Eyre Crowe advised Grey, "I think we must let the Admiralty deal with this question as they consider necessary, and afterwards make such defence of our action to Turkey as we can."<sup>68</sup> Also on that day, Sir Archibald Moore advised Churchill that "once the Turkish

ensign is hoisted, the action of detaining the vessel may involve questions of very serious import."<sup>69</sup> Apparently both the Admiralty and the Foreign Office arrived at the simplistic conclusion that the requisition held little risk to British security, as long as the Turkish flag had not flown over the ships. The Turks thought otherwise, of course, but as Fromkin observed, the decision-makers in London seem not to have been greatly worried about the Turkish reaction. At Churchill's recommendation, the Foreign Office informed the Turks that the ships would be repaired and returned to Turkey after the war, and that the British government would "lease" them in the meantime for the sum of £1,000 per day.<sup>70</sup>

This formula seemed acceptable to the British government because of its continuing assumptions about the weakness of the Ottoman state. The fact that the Turks believed the Dreadnoughts necessary for the survival of their empire and protection from Greece did not enter into British thinking. Nor did they consider the fact that the ships had been purchased by popular subscription from Ottoman subjects throughout the empire. While the British public greeted Churchill's action with acclaim, the Turkish public greeted it with outrage. On 6 August a British

businessman in Constantinople reported to the Foreign Office:

Enver Bey [the Turkish Minister of War] and a considerable section of the Turkish public are in favour of joining the Austro-German alliance, and are using the fact that we have seized the two Turkish Dreadnoughts as an appeal to popular animosity against England.<sup>71</sup>

At the British embassy, the Turks--officials and citizens alike--inundated the staff with protests. According to Andrew Ryan, Fitzmaurice's recent successor as Chief Dragoman, the requisition "had most unfortunate repercussions on our end." Ryan recalled:

They [the Turks] were counting on the ships and ... great efforts had been made to stimulate enthusiasm for the Navy, for which even the poorest had contributed money. The Porte published a communiqué on August 7<sup>th</sup> accusing Great Britain of a breach of International Law, and an extreme [C.U.P.] newspaper invoked "A Thousand Curses" on us. Many private protests streamed into the Embassy, including one from a poor man who attached a Turkish halfpenny to his letter, in case the British should be so impoverished that they could do nothing better than steal ships bought with hard-earned Turkish money.<sup>72</sup>

A week later, the Turks allowed two German battleships, the *Goeben* and *Breslau*, to enter the Dardanelles ahead of a pursuing British squadron.<sup>73</sup> When the Porte announced it was buying the German battleships to replace the ships confiscated by Britain, public and official opinion in Britain quickly turned against

Churchill, who now seemed to have provoked Turkey into the entering the war on Germany's side. Even Prime Minister H.H. Asquith associated the requisition with the Turks' seeming bellicosity, as he explained to his paramour, Venetia Stanley:

We had a Cabinet this morning as usual. The only interesting thing is the arrival of the *Goeben* in the Dardanelles and her sale to Turkey! The Turks are very angry--not unnaturally--at Winston's seizure of their battleships here.<sup>74</sup>

Asquith did not mention that he and the rest of the Cabinet had approved Churchill's decision on 31 July.<sup>75</sup> The seizure was now not theirs, but "Winston's." For the duration of the war and many years after, Churchill bore universal blame in Britain for the Ottoman Empire's entry into the war as an enemy. Lloyd George considered the requisition the cause not just of Turkey's entry, but also of the Dardanelles fiasco of 1915.<sup>76</sup> On the whole, Churchill's critics depicted him as a maverick who had acted short-sightedly and brought Britain much tragedy as a result.

The indictment was significant enough to compel Churchill to respond in his own history of the war, in which he claimed the Cabinet had sanctioned the requisition as a contingency in 1912.<sup>77</sup> David Fromkin has charged that

this claim of Cabinet sanction is untrue, made up by Churchill to escape blame for having created the requisition policy out of whole cloth in July 1914.<sup>78</sup> But Fromkin is incorrect. The idea did not simply occur to Churchill in 1914; and he *did* receive Cabinet sanction in 1912, during the series of meetings of the Committee of Imperial Defence held to discuss the allocation of Britain's naval forces between the Mediterranean and North Seas. The Committee accepted, and Grey specifically supported, an Admiralty memorandum that warned Britain could maintain naval superiority in the Mediterranean over Austria-Hungary, Germany's ally, only by taking over all vessels under construction in British shipyards for foreign powers.<sup>79</sup> This is exactly what Churchill did two years later.

Fromkin has also pointed to the fact that Churchill did not initially requisition the other foreign ships in British shipyards--and there were several--as evidence that Churchill targeted Turkey's warships because the Turks were strategically insignificant.<sup>80</sup> Again Fromkin is incorrect, for reasons set out in the CID meetings of 1912. For the CID had also learned that the combined naval forces of Britain and France could maintain superiority over all

Triple Alliance forces in the Mediterranean by constructing *two additional battleships*.<sup>81</sup> Since the British government could not afford additional construction, the CID hoped to convince Canada to build the ships.<sup>82</sup> Grey further believed that the British could count on diplomacy to prevent any greater combination of forces against the Entente in the Mediterranean--specifically, the addition of Turkey to the Triple Alliance.<sup>83</sup>

But by July 1914, Canada had not contributed the two ships, and the only other Dreadnoughts near completion in Britain were the *Sultan Osman* and *Reshadieh*. There is evidence that Churchill intended to use the ships to ensure the Entente's superiority in the Mediterranean once the German threat had been defeated; he implied so in a letter to the King on 31 July.<sup>84</sup> Since the appearance of their own ships in the Mediterranean under the British flag would have been a serious insult to the Turks, the British historian Geoffrey Miller has charged Churchill with "an amazing lack of political acumen" in this idea.<sup>85</sup> But this charge sells Churchill short. It may be argued that in confiscating the Turkish ships the First Lord sought to satisfy all of the CID's concerns, as he saw them, in one stroke: the two ships would secure the Entente's edge in



the Mediterranean over Austria and Italy (the Triple Alliance), as recommended to the CID, while ensuring Turkey would not be a factor in a Mediterranean naval war, and therefore making diplomacy with the Ottoman Empire less important. In the meantime, as long as the Mediterranean situation remained quiet, the ships could be deployed against Germany. Churchill's decision thus promised to kill three birds with one stone, and may well have stemmed directly from the CID discussions of 1912.

Of course, and to the cost of his reputation, Churchill's plan did not bear fruit, since it was based on the flawed assumption of the "short war" between fleets in the North Sea. The *Sultan Osman* and *Reshadieh* ultimately made no difference in the strategic balance between Britain and Germany; neither were they the primary cause of Turkey's decision to enter the war.

British leaders watched with incredulity the scenes through which Turkey made its way into the Central Powers' camp in the autumn of 1914, because they universally assumed the Young Turks recognized that war against Britain meant suicide for the Ottoman Empire.<sup>86</sup> In British eyes, either Churchill had angered the Turks into the war, or the Germans had forced them into it through the intimidating

presence of the *Goeben* and *Breslau* in the Golden Horn-- there could be no other rational explanation. They did not guess that the Young Turk leaders, prompted by Enver Pasha, the Germanophile Minister of War (see appendix), had begun treaty talks with the Germans on 18 July, two weeks before Churchill confiscated the warships and almost four weeks before the *Goeben* and *Breslau* arrived at Constantinople.<sup>87</sup>

As with the Lowther-Fitzmaurice misinformation, Deedes could have corrected the British government's view of the situation. At the outbreak of the war, he was back in London, and could have assessed the inner workings of the Young Turk regime, having spent his last eight months in Constantinople working in an office next to that of Talaat.<sup>88</sup> Unlike other British officials, he also knew exactly what the Turks' concerns were with respect to the Entente. Tewfik Pasha, the Ottoman ambassador in London, told Deedes weeks before the formal declaration of war that his government intended to side with Germany because of its fears the Entente intended to partition Turkey's domains. Deedes reported this interview to Kitchener, but it is unclear whether Kitchener reported it to anyone else.<sup>89</sup>

Britain's leaders never understood the depth of the Young Turks' determination to secure their empire's

survival through a Great Power alliance. The greatest effect of Churchill's requisition was to provide Enver and his pro-German colleagues with the arguments they needed to persuade the more indecisive members of the Young Turk elite of the wisdom of a German alliance. Much has been made of Churchill's personal appeal on 15 August, in which, as we have seen, the First Lord warned:

I hope you are not going to make a mistake wh[ich] will undo all the services you have rendered Turkey & cast away the successes of the Second Balkan War. By a strict & honest neutrality these can be kept secure. But siding with Germany openly or secretly now must mean *the greatest disaster* to you, your comrades & your country [emphasis added].<sup>90</sup>

Churchill's effort, however, was not only unsuccessful, but also irrelevant and misplaced. Since Enver was the leader of the pro-German effort at the Porte, Churchill was appealing to the man least likely to listen. At any rate, at the time of this telegram, the Turco-German alliance was already thirteen days old, having been signed on 2 August. Enver and his colleagues in the Turkish Cabinet clearly did not intend to wait for the war's end to upset the delicate European balance at whose center they survived.

Conversely, neither Churchill nor anyone else in the British government believed the Turks could survive participation in a European war. British diplomatic

failure in the Ottoman Empire could thus be borne without too much concern, because the British believed Turkey too weak to defend the Dardanelles.<sup>91</sup> Unfortunately for this line of thinking, the British naval advisor to Turkey had done his job too well. In a supreme irony, Limpus, conscientious to a fault and without any inkling that his country might soon be at war with his Turkish employers, had turned his attention in the summer of 1914 to strengthening the Dardanelles defenses.<sup>92</sup> As the July crisis loomed, he had been commissioned by the Ottoman Ministry of the Marine to oversee the fixing of torpedo lines and laying of mines in the Dardanelles.<sup>93</sup> Thus, incredibly, Limpus was in part responsible for emplacing the defenses that would later frustrate British attacks by sea and land, and cut Russia's line of communication to the rest of the Entente.

The British misconceptions continued to the end. Mallet's despatches of the autumn of 1914 betray a delusional optimism that the situation in Constantinople did not warrant, and for which he was later heavily criticized.<sup>94</sup> A cable of 5 October, long after the Turks had shown their intention to attack Egypt, finds him telling Grey, "I am still of opinion that situation may be

saved. Time is now on our side."<sup>95</sup> He wrongly assumed, and advised his superiors in London, that the Entente Powers could obtain Turkey's neutrality by a simple written guarantee of the Ottoman Empire's territorial integrity. Neither Mallet nor the Foreign Office would have understood the skepticism Talaat Pasha later expressed when he pointed out that this pledge "had been repeated many times," but never kept.<sup>96</sup>

In July 1914, Limpus had predicted the British and Ottomans would work closely for the next thirty years.<sup>97</sup> In actuality, they would not remain at peace for even the next thirty days. Though the Turco-German alliance remained secret for more than two months, the Turks immediately began to mobilize and prepare for an attack on the Suez Canal.<sup>98</sup> Even before Mallet returned to Constantinople on 16 August, British diplomacy had become irrelevant. The stage was already set, and the actors costumed, for the bloody four-year drama to follow.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Heller, *British Policy Towards the Ottoman Empire*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Fromkin, p. 41.

<sup>4</sup> Elie Kedourie, *Arabic Political Memoirs and Other Studies* (London, 1974), p. 244.

<sup>5</sup> Lowther to Hardinge, May 29, 1910, in Kedourie, *Arabic Political Memoirs*, pp. 250-51, 256-57.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 255.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>9</sup> Lowther, "Annual Report on Turkey for the Year 1911," in *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, "B" 20:300.

<sup>10</sup> McKale, 25.

<sup>11</sup> See p. 76.

<sup>12</sup> Lowther to Grey, July 30, 1910, in *BD9*(1), no. 161, pp. 180-83.

<sup>13</sup> McKale, 25.

<sup>14</sup> Lowther to Grey, Private, August 4, 1908, in *BD5*, no. 205, p. 239.

<sup>15</sup> Kedourie, *Arabic Political Memoirs*, p. 260.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Grey, 1:168.

<sup>18</sup> Lowther to Grey, Private, August 25, 1908, in *BD5*, no. 209, p. 247; Fitzmaurice to W.G. Tyrrell, Private, August 25, 1908, in *BD5*, no. 210, pp. 248-49.

<sup>19</sup> Foreign Office, Political Diary of the Baghdad Residency for the week ending November 2, 1908, in *Further correspondence respecting the affairs of Asiatic Turkey [and Arabia Confidential print], 1907-1913* (London, 1972), Confidential Series 9433, p. 122.

<sup>20</sup> Lowther to Nicolson, October 24, 1912, in *BD9*(2), no. 60, pp. 47-48.

<sup>21</sup> Fitzmaurice to Tyrrell, *op. cit.*

<sup>22</sup> As discussed in Chapter IV above.

<sup>23</sup> Djemal Pasha, *Memories of a Turkish Statesman* (New York, 1922), p. 21.

<sup>24</sup> Allan Cunningham, "The Wrong Horse?—A Study of Anglo-Turkish Relations Before the First World War," *St. Antony's Papers* 17: *Middle Eastern Affairs*, no. 4, ed. Albert Hourani (Oxford, 1965): 75.

<sup>25</sup> Fromkin, p. 55.

<sup>26</sup> Presland, p. 126.

<sup>27</sup> Fromkin, p. 92.

<sup>28</sup> Fitzmaurice to Tyrrell, *op cit.*

<sup>29</sup> *Hansard* (29 May 1913), c. 381; (12 August 1913), cc. 2291-92.

<sup>30</sup> Fromkin, p. 46.

<sup>31</sup> Ahmad, p. 77.

<sup>32</sup> Alwyn Parker to Djevad Bey, Private, April 18, 1912, in *BD10(2)*, no. 48, p. 66; Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf*, pp. 330-31.

<sup>33</sup> Heller, *British Policy Towards the Ottoman Empire*, p. 60; Joint Minute by Sir A. Hirtzel and Alwyn Parker, in *BD10(2)*, no. 50, p. 67.

<sup>34</sup> e.g., Grey to Lowther, August 17, 1909, in *BD9(1)*, no. 41, p. 50.

<sup>35</sup> Djemal, p. 69.

<sup>36</sup> Miller, *Superior Force*, pp. 163-68.

<sup>37</sup> As mentioned in Chapter V above.

<sup>38</sup> Miller, *Superior Force*, pp. 165-66.

<sup>39</sup> Peter Brook, *Warships for Export: Armstrong Warships, 1867-1927* (Gravesend, England, 1999), p. 140.

<sup>40</sup> Miller, *Straits*, p. 142.

<sup>41</sup> Major G.E. Tyrrell to Lowther, April 29, 1912, in *BD9(1)*, enclosure in no. 403, p. 393.

<sup>42</sup> Heller, *British Policy Towards the Ottoman Empire*, p. 33.

<sup>43</sup> Minute by Mallet, October 6, 1910, in *BD9(1)*, no. 188, p. 217.

<sup>44</sup> Heller, *British Policy Towards the Ottoman Empire*, p. 35.

<sup>45</sup> Churchill to Nicolson, September 26, 1911, in *BD9(1)*, no. 240, p. 278.

<sup>46</sup> Fromkin, 97-98.

<sup>47</sup> Talaat, p. 287.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 288.

<sup>49</sup> Djemal, p. 48.

<sup>50</sup> H.S.W. Corrigan, "German-Turkish Relations and the Outbreak of War in 1914: A Reassessment," *Past and Present* 36 (1967): 151.

<sup>51</sup> Ulrich Trumpener, "Turkey's Entry Into World War I: An Assessment of Responsibilities," *Journal of Modern History* 34 (December 1962): 369-80.

<sup>52</sup> Corrigan, p. 147.

<sup>53</sup> A.L. Macfie, "The Straits Question, 1908-1914,"

*Balkan Studies* 22 (1981): 330-32.

<sup>54</sup> Robert J. Kerner, "Russia, the Straits, and Constantinople, 1914-15," *Journal of Modern History* 1, no. 3 (September 1929): 400-408.

<sup>55</sup> Y.T. Kurat, "How Turkey Drifted into World War I," *Studies in International History: Essays Presented to W. Norton Medlicott*, K. Bourne and D.C. Watt, eds. (London, 1967), p. 295.

<sup>56</sup> H.D. Beaumont, Annual Report on Turkey for 1913, in *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, "B" 20:420-24. The report was prepared at Mallet's direction before the outbreak of the war.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 421.

<sup>58</sup> Memorandum by Mallet, June 19, 1913, in *BD10*(1), Appendix, p. 901.

<sup>59</sup> Joseph Heller, "Sir Louis Mallet and the Ottoman Empire: The Road to War," *Middle Eastern Studies* 12 (1976): 3. Strangely, Mallet was right about being "classed as a failure." When the Foreign Office recommended him as Ambassador to Italy later in the war, Lloyd George rejected the recommendation, citing Mallet's incompetence in Constantinople.

<sup>60</sup> Rooney, p. 12.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Fromkin, p. 55.

<sup>63</sup> Churchill to Prince Louis Battenberg and Sir Archibald Moore, July 28, 1914, in Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume 3*, pt. 1, p. 1.

<sup>64</sup> Moore to Churchill, July 30, 1914, in Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume 3*, pt. 1, p. 5.

<sup>65</sup> Churchill to Moore, August 1, 1914, in Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume 3*, pt. 1, p. 7.

<sup>66</sup> David Fromkin to the author, October 30, 2001.

<sup>67</sup> Gilbert, *The Challenge of War*, p. 156.

<sup>68</sup> Minute by Crowe, July 30, 1914, in Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume 3*, pt. 1, p. 5.

<sup>69</sup> Moore to Churchill, July 30, 1914, *op cit.*

<sup>70</sup> Churchill to Enver Pasha, August 19, 1914, in Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume 3*, pt. 1, pp. 44-45.

<sup>71</sup> Miller, *Straits*, p. 229.



<sup>72</sup> Sir Andrew Ryan, *Last of the Dragomans* (London, 1951), pp. 95-96. Fitzmaurice had been dismissed by Mallet, who considered him too pessimistic and unfriendly to the Young Turks. Djemal later claimed Mallet had dismissed Fitzmaurice at the Young Turks' request. See Djemal, p. 100.

<sup>73</sup> The presence of the *Goeben* and *Breslau* in Constantinople ruined the balance of Mediterranean naval forces outlined in the Admiralty memorandum to the CID in 1912. In one of many strange ironies in this story, the author of that memorandum was Admiral Troubridge, who also commanded the squadron that let the *Goeben* and *Breslau* escape.

<sup>74</sup> H.H. Asquith, *Letters to Venetia Stanley*, Michael and Eleanor Brock, eds. (Oxford, 1982), p. 168.

<sup>75</sup> Gilbert, *The Challenge of War*, p. 192.

<sup>76</sup> Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill* (Boston, 1975), vol. IV, *The Stricken World, 1916-1922*, pp. 752-53.

<sup>77</sup> Churchill, *The World Crisis*, vol. 1, *From the Agadir Crisis to the Battle of the Falkland Islands* (New York, 1923), pp. 208-9.

<sup>78</sup> Fromkin, p. 56.

<sup>79</sup> Thomas, p. 70.

<sup>80</sup> Fromkin, pp. 55-56.

<sup>81</sup> Thomas, pp. 70-71.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., pp. 73-74.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Churchill to the King, July 31, 1914, in Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume 2*, pt. 3, p. 1922.

<sup>85</sup> Miller, *Straits*, p. 222.

<sup>86</sup> Grey, 2:172.

<sup>87</sup> Kurat, p. 297.

<sup>88</sup> Presland, pp. 126, 129.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., pp. 139-40.

<sup>90</sup> Churchill to Enver Pasha, August 15, 1914, in Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume 3*, pt. 1, p. 38.

<sup>91</sup> See p. 68.

<sup>92</sup> Rooney, p. 13.

<sup>93</sup> Djemal, p. 93.

<sup>94</sup> Heller, *British Policy Towards the Ottoman Empire*,

pp. 154-56.

<sup>95</sup> Mallet to Grey, 5 October 1914, in *Correspondence Respecting Events Leading to the Rupture of Relations with Turkey* (London, 1914), no. 108.

<sup>96</sup> Talaat, p. 290.

<sup>97</sup> See note 63 above.

<sup>98</sup> Heller, *British Policy Towards the Ottoman Empire*, p. 152.

## CONSEQUENCES AND CONCLUSIONS

The decision to wage war against the Ottoman Empire proved surprisingly costly for Britain. In strategic terms, the war with Turkey severed Britain's lifeline to her Russian allies through warm-water ports. By closing the Straits, Turkey destroyed Russia's grain trade and prevented Britain and France from resupplying the Russians in the pivotal months leading up to the Russian Revolution. It is not fanciful to say that the closing of the Straits played a key role in driving Russia out of the war and toppling the Romanov dynasty.

Fighting the Turks also exacted a heavy toll on Britain in physical terms. Although British leaders professed reluctance to divert resources from the Western Front, they eventually committed more than one million troops to the Middle Eastern theater. In the first two years of war against Turkey, British forces suffered a series of military disasters on both land and sea. An Anglo-Indian force that invaded the Mesopotamian desert according to Kitchener's plans in early 1915 ended up surrendering--near starvation--the following year. Also in early 1915, a Royal Navy force sustained heavy losses in an

unsuccessful attempt to force the Straits. Ironically, though Admiral Limpus knew the Dardanelles defenses better than any other British flag officer, he was not utilized in the attack on the Straits. Instead, he was posted to Malta because the Foreign Office feared that his participation in operations against Turkey would be an affront to the Turks. The Navy's failure led to the British army's futile ten-month campaign on the Gallipoli Peninsula. Altogether, operations against the Ottoman Empire cost Britain almost half a million casualties.

In a political sense, the war against Turkey forced Britain greatly to expand its empire into the Middle East. Within days of the Ottoman declaration of war, the British government annexed Cyprus and declared a protectorate over Egypt, while the later course of the war extended Britain's long-term presence in the region to Palestine, Iraq, and practically all of the Arabian Peninsula. Lord Kitchener's plan to usurp the Turkish caliphate with an Arab one led directly to British support of the Arab revolt of 1916 and the creation of the modern Arab states of the Middle East--under British suzerainty. The British presence in these new states ensured that Britain would be entangled in the Arab-Israeli conflict for forty years.

All told, and in all terms--strategic, physical, and political--these were heavy prices to pay for warring with the Ottoman Empire.

A few weeks after the Ottoman Empire formally entered the war on the side of the Central Powers, a strange thing took place in Constantinople. When the Turks suspended capitulations for Europeans after the outbreak of war in 1914, the European embassies in Constantinople, whose armies were locked in combat all across Europe, took the extraordinary step of sending a collective protest to the Ottoman government.<sup>1</sup> The representatives of Germany and Austria-Hungary actually sided against their Turkish allies in order to sign a joint note with the representatives of their Entente enemies.

This episode has a sense of the surreal about it. It illustrates the detachment of affairs in Constantinople from those in the capitals of the Great Powers. The logic of decision-making in Europe, which was based on the war among the Great Powers, appeared not to apply in the Ottoman Empire. For decision makers in London, this surrealism was the rule rather than the exception. British decisions on Near East policy seem to have been frequently based upon a mistaken idea of Ottoman affairs. In the

prewar years, British leaders judged developments and people in the Ottoman Empire based on often misleading information from unreliable sources. The result was that leaders in London made decisions without the benefit of a realistic sense of what consequences to expect.

Nothing illustrates the gap between Ottoman fact and British fiction better than the evolving British interpretation of why the Turks went to war in 1914. As we have seen, the British public initially held Winston Churchill responsible for precipitating the Ottoman Empire's entry into the war, as did the two men who led the British government between 1908 and 1922, Asquith and Lloyd George. This theory has had great staying power in historical literature: as recently as 1977, Stephen Roskill blamed Churchill for driving the Turks into the war in *Churchill and the Admirals*. On one hand, this assumption shows that the British government was truly unprepared for the vehemence of the Turkish reaction to the requisition of the *Sultan Osman* and *Reshadieh*. In their shock at the Turkish entry into the war, the British leaders and public attributed more significance to the requisition than was actually warranted. On the other hand, the popular indictment of Churchill as the instigator

of war in the Middle East demonstrates the mistaken British assumption that the Turks had at stake no larger interests of their own that might rationally be worth fighting for.

This assumption about Turkish interests belies the fact that the British government and people generally failed to appreciate the true nature of the Young Turk regime. The British government's misplaced trust in Fitzmaurice and Lowther is a symptom of this tendency. No one in the Foreign Office seems to have realized how fantastic were the assessments of the Turkish government supplied by the embassy in Constantinople during the prewar years. Indeed, Fitzmaurice's and Lowther's input appears to have had staying power in British foreign policy circles. Their conspiracy theories may actually have contributed to Britain's central place in the Arab-Israeli conflict. At least one historian has claimed that the Lowther-Fitzmaurice claptrap about Jewish Freemasons helped spawn the Balfour Declaration (1917) in support of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.<sup>2</sup> According to this argument, British decision makers who took Lowther and Fitzmaurice seriously believed the Ottoman Empire could be defeated with the help of international Jewry, and sought to assuage them with the promise of Zion. The fact that Grey and

other British leaders valued Fitzmaurice's views makes this argument altogether plausible. During and after the war, the Foreign Office continued to rely on Fitzmaurice's judgment in Ottoman affairs: Grey employed him on secret diplomatic missions in the Near East, and Fitzmaurice later helped to draft plans for the postwar partition of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>3</sup>

In the four decades following the war, those in Britain who did not believe the Turks had entered the war as part of a conspiracy of Freemasons, or out of anger with Churchill, believed Turkey had not joined the war of its own accord but had been manipulated into doing so. The opening of the Great Powers' archives--compiled in Britain by the historians Harold Temperley and G.P. Gooch--served to vindicate Churchill to a degree by shifting popular blame in Britain to the Germans. Historians of the 1920s and 1930s came to believe that Germany had forced the Turks into the conflict.<sup>4</sup> In the absence of authoritative Ottoman records on the matter,<sup>5</sup> self-serving Turkish statesmen such as Talaat were happy to relieve themselves of culpability by claiming they had been forced into joining the Central Powers.<sup>6</sup>

This was also Grey's belief. In his postwar account,



*Twenty-Five Years* (1925), he claimed that Germany had acquired great enough influence over the Young Turks to manipulate them into the war. In Grey's view, Britain had sacrificed the influence it needed to keep the Turks neutral by adopting a moralistic stance toward the mistreatment of Christians in the Ottoman Empire. He believed the Germans, meanwhile, guided by *realpolitik*, had pandered to the Young Turks on such issues by ignoring the Turks' moral transgressions.<sup>7</sup>

But Grey's argument does not hold up under scrutiny. In fact, the reverse of his assertion seems to be true. Britain did not lose influence at the Porte as a result of trying to preserve its moral authority. Rather, the British government's numerous contradictory policies toward the Ottoman Empire in the prewar years severely compromised Britain's moral authority in the Ottoman Empire, and harmed its credibility with Ottoman leaders. By the time of the First World War, much of the C.U.P.'s leadership had come to view the British as merely exploitive.<sup>8</sup>

Historians now recognize that the Turkish government joined the Central Powers for reasons that had nothing to do with Freemasonry, and little to do with Germany or Churchill's requisitioning of the dreadnoughts. As we have

seen, the Turks ultimately spurned British influence because they considered Britain a serious threat to their Empire's survival, and thus did not trust British motives. British decision makers did not recognize the extent of the rift that had developed between British and Ottoman interests since Lord Salisbury's time. The Israeli historians Elie Kedourie and Joseph Heller have since shown that Britain's strategic objectives had been moving away from those of the Ottoman Empire for decades before the First World War began. In this view, Britain's increasing interests in areas traditionally controlled by the Ottomans made some sort of Anglo-Turkish confrontation almost inevitable, while the British public's increasing animosity toward the Turks made attempts at *rapprochement* practically impossible. In addition, Great Power politics intervened in the Anglo-Turkish relationship, as Britain, confronted with the rising threat of German power in Europe, found it necessary to foster an alliance with Russia, Turkey's traditional and most feared enemy.

Despite the growing Anglo-Turkish rift, however, the British still had opportunities to avert war. Ironically, the Young Turks' frantic search for security in the prewar years, born of the fear of Russia and Britain, offered the

best chance for Britain to mend its relationship with Turkey, for the Turks were for some time willing to make great concessions to Britain in return for protection from other Powers. Given the decades of British encroachment on Ottoman territory in Egypt and the Persian Gulf, the Turkish offers of alliance in 1911 and 1913 were extraordinary, but they were understandable if we remember that the Young Turks were, above all, Ottoman nationalists who were desperate to save their Empire. As the historians David Fromkin and Geoffrey Miller have argued, the greatest failing of Britain's diplomacy toward the Ottoman Empire in the immediate prewar period was its failure to appreciate the seriousness of the Anglo-Turkish rift; nor did the British appreciate the depth of the Young Turks' insecurity and desperation. In 1911, for example, Grey rejected the Turkish offer of alliance after just one day of consideration.

British representatives in Constantinople, meanwhile, seem to have provided the Foreign Office with either an unjustifiably positive view of the Anglo-Turkish relationship, like that of Mallet and Limpus, or an unjustifiably negative one, like that of Lowther and Fitzmaurice. Certainly no one in the British government

responded to the Turks' wide-ranging offers of alliance to the Great Powers in mid-1914, or perceived the importance of the Young Turks' actions for Britain. Those who might have recognized the seriousness of the situation, such as Deedes, were not consulted.

The preceding paragraphs offer two views of the causes of the war between Britain and the Ottoman Empire. They hold that the war came about because of short-term causes, such as the actions of Churchill or Germany, or because of long-term causes, such as the policy shifts dictated by British public opinion or the formation of the Triple Entente. Both views are correct to some extent. It is true that in the short term British decision makers missed chances to improve the Anglo-Turkish relationship enough to keep Turkey out of the First World War. The historian Allan Cunningham has said that Britain needed, but did not have, another Stratford de Redcliffe with the skill to resolve British and Ottoman differences in the months before the war.<sup>9</sup> It may well have been that a more skillful diplomat than Lowther or Mallet could have satisfactorily addressed the Young Turks' concerns during the Balkan Wars, or during the summer of 1914, and thus averted the Anglo-Turkish war's short-term causes.

The long-term causes of the Anglo-Turkish rift, however, had already created a decision-making atmosphere in London that would have made it nearly impossible for such a diplomatic effort to succeed. When the final crisis in Anglo-Turkish relations came in 1914, the British government was unable to offer the Turks any substantial incentive to remain neutral that would not offend either Britain's Russian allies or British public opinion. Furthermore, British leaders had already concluded that the Ottoman Empire's partition was inevitable, and had thus, consciously or otherwise, begun to treat diplomatic relations with the Porte as somewhat insignificant. In 1867, Lord Stanley had said that the greatest quandary in dealing with the Turks was to know "whom to put in their place."<sup>10</sup> By 1914, the British had resolved this question by deciding to put *themselves* in the Turks' place. The speed with which the British government annexed Cyprus and Egypt, and launched an invasion of Mesopotamia so soon after the declaration of war, seems to betray an assumption that the Ottoman Empire's partition was foreordained. British leaders must surely have known that France and Russia would demand compensation--in the form of Syria and Constantinople--for the British acquisition of such a large

amount of Ottoman territory.

Winston Churchill's belated attempt, by telegram, to dissuade the Turks from entering the war seemed to express all the assumptions and miscalculations that underlay the Anglo-Turkish rift. Like the rest of the British government, Churchill had a mistaken confidence in his assessment of the Young Turks. "I have measured this man," he wrote to Grey, referring to Enver Pasha, "[and] am sure it [the telegram] will do good."<sup>11</sup> This rationale--that a single telegram might repair the Anglo-Turkish divide--demonstrated a misapprehension of the depth of that rift. Churchill's warning to Enver also exhibited the mistaken assumption that Britain's relationship with Turkey was still one of patronage. His words to Enver implied that Britain had the Turks' best interests at heart: "I hope you are not going to make a mistake wh[ich] will undo all the services you have rendered Turkey and cast away the successes of the second Balkan War." Above all, Churchill's warning typified the British government's failure to recognize the consequences of the years it had spent frozen between being a friend or an enemy to the Turks. He had predicted to Enver, "Siding with Germany now must mean the greatest disaster to you, your comrades, &

your country."<sup>12</sup> But the years of indecisive British policy toward the Turks had already taken their toll. The relationship between the British and Ottoman Empires was beyond hope or help. "The greatest disaster" had already befallen them.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Fromkin, p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 198.

<sup>3</sup> Miller, *Straits*, pp. 470-71, 475.

<sup>4</sup> However, most observers still held Churchill responsible for letting the *Goeben* and *Breslau* escape to Turkey, and thus also indirectly responsible for the Middle Eastern war, since the German ships provoked war between Turkey and Russia by bombarding Russia's Black Sea ports.

<sup>5</sup> According to Y.T. Kurat, the minutes of the Turkish cabinet during the immediate prewar period have disappeared. See Kurat, *How Turkey Drifted into World War I*, p. 291.

<sup>6</sup> Talaat, pp. 293-94.

<sup>7</sup> Grey, 1:166-67.

<sup>8</sup> Djemal, p. 112.

<sup>9</sup> Cunningham, p. 72.

<sup>10</sup> Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> Churchill to Grey, August 15, 1914, in Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume 3*, pt. 1, p. 38.

<sup>12</sup> Churchill to Enver Pasha, August 15, 1914, in Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume 3*, pt. 1, p. 38.

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## APPENDIX: PHOTOS AND MAPS

- Djavid Bey, Ottoman Minister of Finance:  
<http://www.manorhouse.clara.net/book2/djavid.jpg>
- *HMS Agincourt*, formerly *Sultan Osman I*:  
<http://www.warship.get.net.pl/Wielka Brytania/Battleships/1914 Agincourt class/Agincourt 03.jpg>
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<http://www.warship.get.net.pl/Wielka Brytania/Battleships/1914 Erin class/Erin 01.jpg>
- Enver Pasha, Ottoman Minister of War:  
<http://www.manorhouse.clara.net/book2/enver.jpg>
- Djemal Pasha, Ottoman Minister of the Marine:  
<http://www.greece.org/genocide/quotes/p-ge-turk-djemalpasha.html>
- Sultan Abdul Hamid II in procession:  
<http://www.manorhouse.clara.net/book2/abdulhamid.jpg>
- Talaat Pasha, Ottoman wartime Grand Vizier:  
<http://www.manorhouse.clara.net/book2/talaat.jpg>
- Sir Louis Mallet, British Ambassador at Constantinople:  
<http://www.manorhouse.clara.net/book2/mallet.jpg>
- Map: The Ottoman Empire in its Final Decade (requires Yahoo! ID to access):  
[http://briefcase.yahoo.com/bc/joel rayburn/vwp?.dir=/Academics/Thesis/Photos&.dnm=Ottoman+Empire.jpg&.src=bc&.view=1&.done=http%3a//brie](http://briefcase.yahoo.com/bc/joel_rayburn/vwp?.dir=/Academics/Thesis/Photos&.dnm=Ottoman+Empire.jpg&.src=bc&.view=1&.done=http%3a//brie)



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[http://briefcase.yahoo.com/bc/joel\\_rayburn/vwp?.dir=/Academics/Thesis/Photos&.dnm=Ottoman+Europe.jpg&.src=bc&.view=1&.done=http%3a//briefcase.yahoo.com/bc/joel\\_rayburn/1st%3f%26.dir=/Academics/Thesis/Photos%26.src=bc%26.view=1](http://briefcase.yahoo.com/bc/joel_rayburn/vwp?.dir=/Academics/Thesis/Photos&.dnm=Ottoman+Europe.jpg&.src=bc&.view=1&.done=http%3a//briefcase.yahoo.com/bc/joel_rayburn/1st%3f%26.dir=/Academics/Thesis/Photos%26.src=bc%26.view=1)

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